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OLDER PEOPLE

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THE PRINCE CONSORT AND HIS BROTHER
THE LETTERS OF LADY AUGUSTA STANLEY
THE LATER LETTERS OF LADY AUGUSTA STANLEY
A VICTORIAN DEAN

} *With the
Dean of
Windsor*

Travel

THISTLEDOWN AND THUNDER
BESIDE GALILEE, A DIARY IN PALESTINE
THE NEW ZEALANDERS

Historical

THE ROMANCE OF WINDSOR CASTLE

frontispiece
THE AUTHOR
in New Zealand



OLDER PEOPLE

HECTOR BOLITHO



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To
MARY *and* WILLIE GRAHAM BROWNE
in celebration of the
TENTH YEAR OF OUR FRIENDSHIP
WITH MY LOVE

Chapter One

ENGLISH boys, born in beautiful houses and growing up with old pictures and furniture about them, cannot realise the sensations of a New Zealander in his twenties, coming to England for the first time from the raw countries of the South.

There are few fine houses in New Zealand and little furniture which is not merely adequate and gimcrack. The landscape is as beautiful as any in the world and its contrasts are exciting. Oranges, peaches and sweet grapes ripen in the valleys of the northern island at the same time as the impish school boys of the south are making snow-men on the slopes of the hills. Some of the farm land is gentle and subdued as Sussex, with stone fences and pools of wild poppies in the hollows. But there are mountains rising nine thousand feet from the undulating plains, with flame and lava in their throats. Trees are abundant. The hills are gay with broom and honeysuckle and the wild orchids and ferns make a carpet beneath the silent arches of the forest. There is so much beauty that few New Zealanders have any wish to turn from the hills and the valleys to find pleasure in pictures, sculpture, music and architecture.

The people of the new country, with their active, every-day life, have no great need for æsthetic adventures. An art gallery, a literary society and a

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lending library satisfy any craving for 'the quiet air of delightful studies' which may be stirred when the work of the day is ended. Sometimes, however, there is a changeling in the brood. A shy brat is thrown upon the little, matter-of-fact world, to grow up wondering why he does not fit into the colonial mosaic. He is not excited by games and he hates the prospect of conflict. As he grows older, he indulges in self-pity and introspection. Then he comes dangerously near to losing all sense of humour in regard to himself.

I stood upon this precipice when I was sixteen. I had read a good deal of Balzac, the *Decameron*, Flaubert and Paul de Kock : even Rabelais. In my precocious choice of books I was incited by priggishness rather than a wish for knowledge, for I merely laughed at pornography and thought it funny.

I squandered the warm summer days in writing a great historical drama. A friend of mine was already half way through a tragedy called *Judith of Bethulia* and he was only sixteen. (I recall the scene in which the city gates were flung open for Judith. She turned to the guard and said with naive politeness, 'Thank you very much.') My historical drama was to be called *Maria Christina, Empress of Sweden*. It was to be a sequence of four hundred sonnets, written in the pure Italian form. The play was to open with a scene in which twenty silver pillars rose from a vermillion floor. On the left there was to be a black marble staircase leading

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to a black marble throne. The only occupant of the stage was to be a black snake, crawling across the floor. (Why, I do not know). The Empress was to emerge from vague curtains, summon her courtiers and give them their orders for the day in a series of eight perfect sonnets. The play was to end with a scene in which Maria Christina and Descartes were discovered, sitting in the snow, at seven o'clock in the morning. They were to talk of *higher things*, each strip of dialogue being a perfect sonnet. I recall her opening line :—

This hand was made for love, not bloody deeds.

I offer two shreds of evidence in my favour. I was diligent enough to write fifty-one of the sonnets and wise enough to tear them up when I came upon them again some years afterwards.

My school-master took my *Decameron* from me and he reported my sin to my father. My father was a gentle saint who never pried nor suspected. He bought me great bound volumes of *Chums* and *The Boy's Own Paper*, but these only diverted my wickedness without diminishing it. I abandoned the idea of becoming a doctor or a lawyer and wished to become a pirate. A serial story, dark with murder, robbery and battle, sent me along avenues of sin more dangerous than Balzac's novels could ever have done.

Some months after these morbid changes of ambition, I went to one of the meetings of the Chapman

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Alexander Mission and, bobbing forward like a cork on the wave of unhealthy emotionalism, I found myself kneeling among the penitents on the floor of the Auckland Town Hall, promising to devote my life to mission work in the South Seas. I turned from piracy to religion over-night. I saved five pounds with which to leave my old life and travel to the Tongan Islands to convert the savages. The satellite of the mission who converted me borrowed the five pounds I had saved and I never saw or heard from him again. In my disgust, I turned to piracy once more. At this point, an older man was kind to me. He gave me *Redgauntlet* to read, and then *Gulliver's Travels*. My reaction was surprising. I took to reading Bacon's *Essays* and Dryden. Then I became a friend of Mr. Pickwick. Through him I learned to laugh again and I was saved.

The education of a colonial boy is usually towards the plough or the ledger. If the changeling is not attracted by these ways and dares to feel that the solution of his repressions is to be found in reading or in deeper comprehension of form and colour, he must go upon his quest alone. His contemporaries run from their play-ground, to search for him in the leafy hollow to which he has escaped. They find him reading Shelley, Walter Pater, Poe or Wilde, and he is thought to be crazy. With a wide, new and beautiful country spreading about him ; country made for pranks and escapades, why should any boy sit beneath a magnolia tree and read :—

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Leave thy father, leave thy mother

And thy brother :

Leave the black tents of thy tribe apart !

Am I not thy father and thy brother,

And thy mother ?

And thou—what needest with thy tribe's black tents

Who hast the red pavilion of my heart ?

The boy is *obviously crazy* and in the end, his prying contemporaries leave him alone because they do not understand him. His dangerous self-pity becomes all the more painful then, for he is in need of companionship beyond his books and his humourless devotion to himself.

He slowly builds up a store of learning which is different from that of an English boy. His knowledge is only a colourless book of letterpress. He has not yet seen the jets of diamonds pouring from the fountains of Dresden, the moon over Sinai, the churches of East Anglia or the fat barges on the Thames. His book of knowledge is therefore without illustrations. He reads Dubedat's creed in *The Doctor's Dilemma*,

I believe in Michael Angelo, Velasquez, and Rembrandt ; in the might of design, the mystery of colour, the redemption of all things by Beauty . . .

but he has no notion of the awful power of Michael Angelo's *Moses* until, as an older man, he crosses the world and learns to browse among the memorials of Rome. And he may do no more than guess at the

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calm beauty of the two Velasquez heads in the gallery in Cassel, through the black and white reproductions he has found in a text book. The might of design is in the colonial hills and the mystery of colour is in the colonial valleys. But it is not down these avenues of beauty that the boy's redemption lies. He is aching for the phrases of great music and the colour and form in great pictures. His eyes are searching beyond the New Zealand hills and he yearns for the older hills of England, of which the poets have sung.

The English boy may read *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* with full knowledge of the Wessex country in which the story is laid. He may see Tess at the fair. His pleasure in reading is thus intensified, for he knows the trees and the flowers of Wessex, and the colour of its earth. He may languish upon the slopes of Fowey and even see Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch at his Cornish window—

*Above a harbour fair,
Where vessels picturesquely rigg'd
Obligingly repair.*

Eton boys may walk over to Stoke Poges* and see the 'rugged elms . . . the yew-tree's shade' of Gray's country church-yard. Their leaving prizes, bound in vellum, are less dull when they too know the frail memorials beneath which the forefathers of

* An old Etonian friend has added this comment to my manuscript. 'The Eton boys *may* walk to Stoke Poges, but they don't.' H.B.

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the hamlet sleep. The English boy may sit beside Tennyson and see :—

*Across my garden ! and the thicket stirs,
The fountain pulses high in sunnier jets,
The blackcap warbles, and the turtle purrs,
The starling claps his tiny castanets.
Still round her forehead wheels the woodland dove
And scatters on her throat the sparks of dew,
The kingcup fills her footprint, and above
Broaden the glowing isles of vernal blue.*

For the colonial youngster who has not yet come to England, the poets and painters have lived in a world of which he may do no more than dream. He is confused when he looks out towards the colonial saw-mills and the butter factories, trying to obliterate them and to imagine the English scene. He is not allowed to know Constable's London from Hampstead Heath, nor the statue of Charles the First in Trafalgar Square, nor the stateliness and elegance of great country houses, like Blickling and Petworth. He must wait until he crosses the world before he may know what Dubedat meant when he cried for his redemption by beauty. When the awkward colonial does come to England, after years of frustration and hunger, his sensations and delight are something of which the English boy may not even be allowed to dream.

When I began to earn money as a writer, it was not as a poet or as a playwright. I became shipping

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reporter on an Auckland newspaper and instead of arranging the entrances and exits of the Empress Maria Christina, in gorgeous velvet dresses, I recorded the comings and goings of little steamers laden with copra and bananas and flax. At first the work was galling to me, but I soon learned to love the great ships that came in from the ports of the world. They linked our solitary islands with the cities of which I had always dreamed. This was in the early days of the war, when old barques were being restored to life, because of the need for more tonnage. They came into our harbour, sometimes in full sail, just as the early colonising ships must have come in the 'forties. I talked with sailors from the Pacific Slope and with red-faced captains who had brought their camouflaged, unlighted ships stealthily through waters which were dangerous with enemy submarines. I smoked opium in the fo'c'sle of a Chinese ship for a second and thought it silly and unpleasant. I think that it was in the eyes of sailors that I first realised the light of unselfishness: the talent for living for something beyond my own introspection. On the wharves of Auckland, I first thought of a different world; not one in which I should find selfish escape and peace, but one in which I might find some work to do. They were brave days for shipping. Count Luckner had not been captured. He was still cruising in the Pacific, with his dreaded *Seeadler*, and every now and then a ship would come in with tales of mysterious signals at sea, or of submarines off the coast of Africa.

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One day the editor of my newspaper called me into his room and asked me what books I read. He was a wonderful old man who had begun his life as a socialist. He had tried to realise his dream by leading a colony of socialists to an El Dorado in South America, an El Dorado which had failed. Now he was a silent, stern, scholarly old man, editing our most Tory newspaper and writing articles in which we caught glimpses of a different man from the one who moved among us : one who seldom talked and who never said an unnecessary word. I told him that I was reading almost anything that came to my hand.

‘ Do you read the Bible ? ’ he asked.

I confessed that it had been a Sunday school task and therefore unpalatable to me. In his cold, certain voice, he said, ‘ Read the Old Testament right through and then come and talk to me about it ! ’ I did as he told me and went to him, on the day before I was to leave for my first holidays. He pressed some money into my hand and said, ‘ Read the book of Job. Read it again and again. But also, enjoy your holiday.’

I went away for ten days. I read as he told me, and one verse of Job remained with me, more clearly than the rest.

‘ With the ancient is wisdom ; and in length of days understanding.’

The early rewards I had wished for did not come to me. My poems were returned from magazines

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and a play which I finished was lost in the office of the theatrical manager to whom I sent it. Slowly I learned to love my day-to-day work and I left the grander forms of literature alone. Even my journalism brought its laurels. The captain of a Japanese ship, who was pleased with something I had written about him, presented me with a live sucking pig. This was the first time I was able to realise what is meant by the worn phrase, 'It is the thought that matters.' No gift was ever more embarrassing, for I found myself in the city of Auckland on the afternoon when all the butcher's shops were shut, struggling with a lively pig, almost as strong as myself. I was not allowed to board a tram and I could not afford a taxi-cab. I dragged my squeaking, struggling companion up the main street, in ignominy far deeper than blushing or wounded pride. In the end, I found the back-door of an hotel and an astonished cook who thought me mad. 'Here is a present for you,' I whispered. I shoved the pig in through the doorway, turned, and ran as fast as my legs would carry me.

I was forced to wait for five years before I was able to travel to England, but the wish only grew stronger during the last years of the war and an interlude in Australia. Here success came too easily, for Australia is a market for cheap wit and sentimentality. I was made literary editor of a big daily newspaper and I poured out careless, noisy prose until I came near to losing the last shred of my self-respect.

One morning, I went into my office and found,

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on top of my letters, one with the words *Norddeutscher Lloyd* printed in red, on the envelope. Inside there was a notice to tell me that the first German cargo ship, since the war, was to sail from Sydney in four weeks' time. I left the hard, ugly city. We sailed around the coast, gathering a few German passengers who had been interned in Australia during the war. I used to lie in my cabin as we steamed through the Indian Ocean, listening to their songs and the aching cry which came into their voices when they talked of going home. I rose from the loneliness of the southern hemisphere, towards the crowded countries of the old world : Egypt, Italy, France and then the miracle of London. I went to live in a flat in Chelsea and there, through the foggy winter days, I tried to comprehend England. 'I must introduce you to the *litterati*,' a tall, unwashed playwright said to me. I followed at his heels like a lamb. Sometimes I was lonely. I recall giving a match-woman in Piccadilly a shilling to wish me a Happy New Year, as the bells were ringing and the river shrieking with sirens. But the loneliness soon passed. I came to know the unpretentious beauty of English homes and the natural hospitality of the people who lived in them. The first time I ever drank tea in a London house was as the guest of Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson. It was, I think, my third afternoon in London. Bedford Square was peppered with light rain ; enough to darken the pavement and the stone houses, making them still more solemn. In the beginning, I was disappointed by the gloom of the façades of

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the houses. They seemed to be morose and forbidding . . . packed close, shoulder to shoulder, with neither lawns nor gardens at their feet. Now and then I came upon the house of some abandoned creature who had painted her door sealing-wax red or lime green. I was thankful for the colour, but I was rather afraid that the people who lived inside were not quite nice to know. During my first year in London, none of the houses in Bedford Square was so incautious as to wear a red or green door. The scene was sedate enough for my first visit and my first five o'clock tea.

Looking back, I feel that some kind angel must have arranged for Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson to be my first host. It came about in this way. On my last day in Sydney, before I sailed for England, I went to tea with Lady Forbes-Robertson, who had come across the world to act for us, using still her maiden name of Miss Gertrude Elliot. We were grateful when lovely women came to our new countries, to refresh us with good plays and beautiful voices. I drank tea with Lady Forbes-Robertson in a high building of flats. From her window we could see the medley of wet roofs shining in the twilight, and the deep sapphire stretch of the harbour, with twenty glittering ferry boats, moving across to the suburbs on the other side. I was to sail next day in the German freighter. Lady Forbes-Robertson talked to me of London and I listened like a child. Was I not to sail for England myself, on the following day: through the Indian Ocean, past the golden

shore of Arabia and to Naples, Paris and London ? The world was my promised oyster then. Lady Forbes-Robertson talked to me of Mr. Bernard Shaw and of her husband's early friendship with Samuel Butler. I was already half-way across the world as she spoke. My ticket was safe in my pocket-book and I had already travelled far from the little antipodean tea-cup in which I was born. When our talk was over Lady Forbes-Robertson stretched out her hand and drew pen and paper towards her. A note was written and given to me. ' This is a letter to my husband. Send it to him when you arrive in London. I shall write to him too and tell him all about you.'

So it was that the first English host I saw, standing against the flames of his drawing-room fire, bending down to lift a scone from a covered silver dish, was one of the most gracious and charming Englishmen alive. For his voice to have been the first to welcome me into an English house was an excitement which will be understood only by those who have heard him speak.

I sat in a deep chair. Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson stood against his fire and he told me stories . . . stories of his plays, of Samuel Butler and himself learning to paint together, when Sir Johnston was young : stories of the trenchant wit of Mrs. Patrick Campbell and of the letter full of advice which Mr. Bernard Shaw had once written to him when he was about to play Hamlet. But it was not for this alone that I was delighted. Our sitting-rooms in New Zealand are matter-of-fact and all

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much the same. In England, rooms are tied to their owners by a hundred objects which belong to them in the same way as the clothes they wear. Their possessions are inherited with their names. No other people in the world can make a room comfortable as the English do. American drawing-rooms are impersonal and over-tidy. In German sitting-rooms, one never seems to find any comfortable chairs. Like most other Britons, I have never been invited into French drawing-rooms so I do not know what they are like. But an English drawing-room (unless it has been furnished in the wicked period of comfortless gilt), enjoys what we know as the 'lived-in feeling.' The chairs make you wish to stay. The glimpses of knitting needles, the open book upon a reading stand, the ash tray and match-box near enough to save you from a journey across the room : all seem to be planned to make you feel 'at home.' I have been in many rooms since this day of my first London tea, but none can ever be more kind to me, nor any voice of welcome more beautiful than the one which said, 'You'll come to like England. Don't be afraid of it. And always feel that you can drop in to tea any afternoon you wish.'

I was seldom afraid of London. There was no material struggle to agitate me, for I found both editors and publishers to be amenable and human. But the chatter of the writers I met in the Café Royal and in the bars of the Chelsea hotels seemed to me to be rather foolish. They were mostly lounging fellows who neither lived nor wrote the poetry they

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talked about. I was not wise enough to see through their intellectual tomfoolery, but I found myself drifting away from them before I was many weeks older. I did not understand them and their cleverness made me self-conscious. They were so quick with their repartee that they always had their answers ready before they had time to think. The muffin man was tangible to me, walking out of the moonstone mists by the river, his bell laughing through the nauseating dampness of the street. I could talk to him of his wife and of his children. And the man at the corner of Margaretta Terrace with the barrow of cinerarias, who said to me, 'It's not the flowers you're smelling, sir, it's the whole bloomin' countryside !' And the Italian waiter at Bassi's, in the King's Road, his slim, olive hand placing mustard sauce beside my herring ! He spoke of life in simple terms. He came from the vine-laden valleys, through which I had lately passed, between Rome and Genoa, and he went there every year, to see his father and his mother.

The best-beloved of all was my Cockney servant. From the day of her arrival she assumed the dominion and confidence of a mother. Mrs. A. was a remarkable woman to see and to know. Her feet were flat but the toes of her old shoes turned up so that they seemed to laugh as she walked. She wore a strangled feather boa and a hat, huge and black, shaped like a coal-scuttle. She carried a bag as full of surprises as the bag of the Swiss Mrs. Robinson. She came to me with three references ; strange,

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beautiful, because of her gay eyes and her crinkled, jolly smile. One day, she came in a golden hat and a whole lambskin, hung on her shoulders for a cape. 'I was hoping you'd tell me I looked smart, sir,' she said, rather coyly, as I took her to the door.

Mrs. A. sends me a scarlet poppy every Armistice day, packed into a battered boot-box. For Christmas she sends a heavily tinselled card, always with the same message. 'Love and respects from the old nuisance.'

Neither the muffin man nor Mrs. A. were molested by introspection or bogus talk about feelings and self-expression. When I went to the Café Royal or to Oddenino's, I was bewildered. The lions I met there seemed to be rather mangy. Of all the artists I saw during my first weeks in London, the only one who appeared superb was Mr. Jacob Epstein. I did not appreciate the young man who cut the leading article out of *The Times*, chewed it up and swallowed it, because he liked the thoughts it expressed. Nor did I enjoy meeting the man who fed his wife on cabbage leaves to keep her pale. Of all the company at the Café Royal, Jacob Epstein alone seemed courageous. He walked and talked as a man scorning expedients: a man seeking fiercely for truth and beauty. I am pleased now, after fourteen years, to search my memory and find that the muffin man, Mrs. A., and Jacob Epstein are the people who stand out of the conglomeration most clearly. I had been in London for many days before I realised that the

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stronghold of taste, knowledge and devotion to beauty was not to be found in any coterie or in any restaurant, with its clap-trap talk of *Art* : that I must seek elsewhere for the meal of which I had dreamed during my boyhood in New Zealand. I found it in the end, among older people.

Coming from a new country and being flung into English life gives one advantages in making judgments. Britons are inclined to imagine that they belong to one splendid scheme of living and that their aims are akin. This has never appeared so to me. British people seem to be divided into three definite groups. Midway are the embittered and self-righteous ones, of the generation which prepared for the war. They seem metallic to me and out of touch with the life of either the very old or the young. They are represented in our time by a few Edwardian hostesses who rule their own kind of selfish society, without either the grand manner of the great Victorians or the democratic friendliness of the younger people. On one side of them is the group of two younger generations : the one which fought in the war and the one which is obliged to pay for the war, in an anxious search for work and self-respect. England has worried about the depressed areas for many years, but she has done little to give the educated young a sense of purpose in their lives, and has left many of them with the melancholy conviction that they belong to an unwanted generation. As I was involved neither in the war nor in the years of preparation for battle, I feel

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a detachment in viewing the gaps which separate the generations and I have often been distressed and shocked by the despair which assails the younger people of to-day. Through education, they are led up to doors which are closed to them. They have seen the legend of *peace through war* tumble to pieces and they have seen the authority of the established Churches no longer capable of giving them either a help in time of need nor a focus for their devotion. They have therefore turned away from organised Christianity. They try to grow spiritually through personal experience, rather than inherited dogma : to approach the spiritual without the aid of an agent. I do not believe that the parents of to-day begin to realise the sadness of the life of their sons and daughters in their teens. Lack of concentration, love of noise and speed are merely superficial manifestations of a deep sense of futility and disappointment. The insensibility and arrogance which bred the war is still strong enough in the generation of older parents to guard them from understanding the spiritual hunger of the young : still strong enough to prevent them from knowing that the only harvest of the war, as far as the young are concerned, is the grim privilege of existing in a world which has no need for them. They have ' the counsels of the middle-aged ' and ' the prayers of the old,' but there is no work for them to do. Upon the other side of the Edwardian parents, I have found those older men and women who carry some vestige of the elegance, politeness, and sense of personal responsibility

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of the Victorian era into our own troubled century. In their way of living I have found the instincts of unselfishness, the unaffected culture and the repose which, as a child, I believed to be the foundation of English character.

I have sometimes been sorry for English people who are denied the excitement which the New Zealander in his twenties may know, coming to London for the first time. For him, the memorials, the beauty and the life of the great city are an adventure. He does not presume to take them for granted. The London boy is used to the serene houses in Cheyne Walk, the glimpse of Kensington Palace over the greensward, seen from the busy road, and the double pleasure of the scene from the bridge in St. James's Park, looking west to Buckingham Palace and east towards Whitehall. He is familiar with these scenes almost as soon as he is able to walk. When he grows up, they seem to be lost in the panorama of his daily routine. He does not pause to discover the fresh tricks of sunlight skipping among the trees, nor to smell the good smell of the flowers. He hurries by the noble stretch of water in St. James's Park and the sight of the palace against the sky. For him, the bridge seems to be no more than a way by which he passes from Westminster and Whitehall into the Mall. Millions of Londoners walk in the City during the days of the week, but how many of them ever go there on Sunday, when the streets are empty and quiet . . . Bread Street, Friday Street, Distaff Lane and Godliman Street? You may pass

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up Ave Maria Lane, round Amen Corner into Paternoster Row and find the Chapter Coffee House in which Charlotte Brontë stayed on the way to Brussels. You may talk to the waitress and hear of the underground passage between the Coffee House and St. Paul's—the passage by which the priests used to walk from the Cathedral to take their bread and wine between the services. Finding such corners was a great delight to me when I first came to London. I liked to wander alone in the city, or in the lesser streets of the west. I found the scene of the opening of *Tancred* in Shepherd's Market and the stout iron bar at the end of the passage between Berkeley Square and Curzon Street, put there in the days of the highwaymen, to prevent them from escaping on their horses. I learned to buy my hats at Lock's and to have my hair cut at Burgess's in the Opera Arcade, in a room which is still as it was when the Duke of Wellington himself went there to have his hair cut. These shops seemed to be part of London's history. Perhaps I am wrong in accusing all the tried Londoners of being neglectful of the charm of their city! In the beautiful months of August and September, London changes under the spell of warmth and holidays. I have dined on a Soho pavement in the open air, beneath orange trees, in August. On such a warm summer night, with a dinner made merry by good *chianti* and ending with a *xabaglione*, with grubby Italian urchins tumbling in the gutters and a street musician playing,

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The musical score is written on two staves in G major (one sharp) and 4/4 time. The first staff begins with a forte (*f*) dynamic. The melody consists of quarter and eighth notes. The lyrics are: "Look down on me, my comfort / In pres-daal duol, non mi la". The second staff begins with a *dim.* (diminuendo) marking, followed by a piano (*p*) dynamic. The melody continues with quarter and eighth notes. The lyrics are: "be, And guide my steps.... a -- right! / - sciar, O ma-dre mi - a pie -- tà!".

London might be Naples. For a few brief weeks, this illusion of summer lasts. Even the people of London change and there are some in the stream passing over the bridge in St. James's Park, who meander in idleness. They walk like ghosts in the evening light, which obliterates the red and pink stocks, allowing only the white flowers to shine. The Londoners who come here in the warmth of August seem to be strangers, walking as if they are pilgrims arrived from outlying places. They will lean upon the railing of the bridge for ten minutes or so and not seem envious of their brethren on the Scottish moors.

There was one man, who was my friend, to whom the bridge and the scene in St. James's Park were paradise. He became my friend by sad and cruel ways. He had been the mayor of a town in New Zealand. He was the first man who ever encouraged me to read and to write, first for my pleasure and then for my trade. I saw him only twice when I was a boy. We lived at different ends of the northern island and it was not easy for us to meet. But he sent me books to read and he told me, with gentle encouragement, how I might learn to write. It was

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strange that he should have chosen the pomp of being mayor of his town, for he was a scholar and more at home with his books and his pen than among by-laws and foundation stones. There was one dark streak in his character which brought him to law-breaking in the end and then to imprisonment. He was dragged from his mayoral chair and from the cultivated air of his library and desk, to be flung into gaol. For seven years he was a prisoner and when his sentence was ended, he came to England. He had lost everything. The books he had loved had been sold and his name was a byword among those who had been his friends. It was one of the most generous moves of fate that allowed me to be among the people who were kind to him, for he had been infinitely kind to me, when I was in my mental swaddling clothes and able to give him nothing but my thanks in return. His body was tired and warped when he arrived in London, and he was poor. Slowly, the wonder of England enlivened his blood and smiles came to his melancholy face. One day, he wrote me a letter. He had been wandering in the London streets, he said, through Trafalgar Square and up, under the Admiralty Arch, towards Buckingham Palace. Chance had made him turn into St. James's Park. 'I have seen the view from the bridge,' he wrote. 'Standing there, about six o'clock, when the light was fading, quite calm, with the noise of London beyond the trees, I almost began to be thankful for all that has happened. I could go back there again and again. It is

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the most beautiful discovery I have made in London.'

One evening I went to St. James's Park with him after dinner and we leaned over the railing of the bridge, smoking our cigars, until the forms and the noises about us were dimmed by the increasing night. In the weeks that followed, he went there almost every evening and he celebrated his little journeys with a bombardment of gay postcards. One arrived almost every morning, with a joke, a verse, or a frank expression of the joy he had found over the beauty of the evening light or the scent of the flowers. My friend was killed in a street in Berlin, during a May Day riot. For a year or more, England had given his life a benison, soothing him for all he had suffered. I think that in the end, he regretted none of the violence and punishment which had forced him to slink away and hide himself in London. His pride and his laughter came back to him before he died.

If I could live my life over again, I would not demand many changes from what has already happened to me. I would not change the plan which kept me away from England for so long, because, coming home in my twenties, I have not taken its beauty for granted and I have not failed to look upon almost every day I have lived here as a privilege I barely deserve.

Chapter Two

I LEARNED little of architecture and pictures from the buildings and galleries of New Zealand and until I was nineteen, I was in the uncertain state of knowing 'only what I liked.' I have not found that my likes and dislikes have changed very wildly, with the growing knowledge which has come to me in England. St. Paul's Cathedral did not excite me when I first saw it and I still pass it with the same kind of wonder with which a child sees an elephant. The big buildings of the old world disappointed me. In St. Peter's I felt rather as Alice must have done when she took her diminishing medicine. The churches of East Anglia have always given me more pleasure than the great cathedrals of Westminster and York. Shocking as it may seem, the size of Westminster Abbey has often oppressed me and I have turned to the line of Queen Anne houses in North Street nearby, with the sensations of escape and calm. It was in the domestic buildings of England that I learned to appreciate architecture. Walking upon Evelyn's terrace at Albury, when the forget-me-nots and wallflowers were in bloom, seeing Audley End from the high road, or Blickling down the approach of yew hedges, gave me my chief pleasures. A vast, imposing building seems incongruous, growing like a moloch above the streets and traffic of a city. But a beautiful house, with its gardens,

its furniture and its air of utility, has always been to me a perfect monument to both architect and craftsman. This has seemed to be especially true when the possessions in a house have been gathered, unselfconsciously, by generations of well-bred and intelligent people, rather than in houses where fine pictures and furniture have been bought by one rich generation. The sense of continuity makes English homes beautiful to me, rather than the merit and value of the treasures they contain. Surely it is ostentatious for an architect to make a building so immense that one is agape before its awful size : impressed first by its engineering and only secondly by its handsome proportions and the good taste of its ornaments. Occasions have sometimes made the cathedrals alive to me and therefore beautiful. One evening, some years ago, I was asked to dine with Doctor Sydney Nicholson in his house in the cloisters of Westminster Abbey. I had met him during a hurried journey across Canada. He became a different person when he was blown from a Canadian train into his beautiful old house within the precincts of the Abbey. In Canada, he had seemed to be wrenched from his setting, playing upon cinema organs and eating clam chowder on a train. In Westminster, he was at home. When dinner was over, he led me through the silent cloisters to a little side-door of the Abbey ; a door modest enough to have been the entrance to a house. There was one small, blue gas flame burning within the great nave. Otherwise, the arches and the stalls of the choir were

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in darkness. The drone of busy London sounded outside, like the surging of a sea, beating against the vast Gothic rock. The lights of Parliament Square streamed in through the multi-coloured windows, painting the woodwork with topaz and ruby and sapphire. The glow was enough to light the nave, but within the high oak screens of the choir it was so dark that I stumbled clumsily as I followed at Doctor Nicholson's heels. He led me to a seat and then he left me. A moment or so afterwards, a little light appeared in the organ loft and then, the first, gentle notes of Bach's Toccata and Fugue in D Minor came down to me. For an hour the Abbey was my own. The music filled the high dim arches : now frail, gossamer music, slight enough for me to be able to hear the purr of the traffic outside : now broadening, full and powerful, strong and serene as eagles in flight, beating up against the stone tracery. Centuries seemed to be awakened from their sleep, out of the darkness and the sable shadows.

When Doctor Nicholson came down from the organ loft, he led me once more through the shadows and we stood by Queen Elizabeth's tomb. The yellow glow from the windows was enough for me to distinguish the recumbent form and the sharp features of the effigy, accentuated by the light and shadows. We walked back towards the little door and within a few minutes I was outside the Abbey, alone. It was odd and terrifying to be in a London street again and I felt like a visitor from another

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world as I raised my arm and hailed the taxi-cab which carried me home.

Through the kindness and patience of older people I slowly came to know England as a store house of beautiful things. There was one friend who could make history live for me, as we walked in old places. His knowledge was enlivened by his intense love of human nature and the history he taught me was of a procession of people rather than of the bald acts of their lives, or of the inanimate objects they had touched. To walk with him in a gallery was a delight, especially when we came upon the pictures which were painted when he was young. He knew the Victorian painters as his friends and he had lived in great houses, in which he had grown up, familiar with good pictures and beautiful furniture. He was my master, but there was none of the coldness of pure scholarship in his teaching. I like to remember one summer day when we went to the Isle of Wight and walked on the tumbled battlements of Carisbrooke. From the conglomeration of fallen stones and tidied decay, he made the scenes of its history alive for me : William the Conqueror arresting his half brother in the great hall, and the islanders climbing the hill to see the remnant of Philip's galleons straggling past after their defeat : Charles the First exercising himself upon the ramparts and on the bowling green, and then the awful day when the King was taken across the Solent to his death. We found the grave of his young daughter who died, ' consumed by a feverish distemper,' her ' fair cheek resting on a Bible which

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was the last gift of her murdered father.' Two hundred years afterwards, Queen Victoria had placed a memorial over the grave of the Stuart princess, as 'a token of respect for her virtues and of sympathy for her misfortunes.' As the stories were told to me, any bookish knowledge I had gathered as a child was lost in the delight of my friend's imagination. He brought the 'flush of life . . . back into the hard face of dead ceremonies.' Where, as a child, I had known England through my school lessons, I came to love it, because of what I felt and because of what my master taught me to understand.

His own character was reflected in his view of the great people of history. My school book had told me that George the Third was a crazy king. When I confessed this silly idea of him, my friend was patient. He would sit beside the fire and talk to me of the character of George the Third ; of his devotion to those who were kind to him ; of his patronage of the painters of the time, and of his kindness to Mrs. Delaney. There was a letter among the papers my master had inherited, telling of a day when the King went to see the Queen at Kew, after he had recovered from one of the dark seasons of his madness. As he was walking through the passages, on the way to the Queen's room, he had stuffed a little cushion within his clothes because, he said, he did not wish her to see how wasted and thin he was. As I listened, the crazy King of my school-book became a sad and beautiful character. My friend swept my silly picture of a prudish and arrogant Queen Victoria

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aside and told me of her day-to-day life at Windsor, so that she seemed to live again. I heard her merry laugh and the rustle of her ample skirts as he recalled her. Every figure was softened by the humanity of his judgment and brought near to me through his knowledge. I should like you to see my friend, about half-past nine of a winter evening, sitting far back in an arm-chair, beside an open fire. The huge stone slabs in which the fire was framed were of the time of Edward the Third. The logs burned against a background of herring-bone Tudor bricks. Every colour in the room was deep and rich and the carpet was a huge, faded Turkey, with a hole in it. During eight years I heard him say many times, 'I must buy another carpet.' But it was never bought for he was afraid that a new carpet would be an interloper in the room, where every object knew its neighbour so well.

The room was the library, and where the walls were not pleasant Elizabethan panelling, they were covered by book-cases. Upon one wall was *poetry* both grave and gay. Upon another was the ecclesiastical library. These books made a beautiful wall, for they were bound in leather and embellished with gold. But they were seldom molested, except by the housemaid's feather duster, for my friend drew his faith from God and his knowledge from the men he knew. He had none of the ways of a scholar. Upon the third wall of the library were *biography* and *travel*. I should like you to stay with me before this wall of books for a little while. Sir Walter

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Scott seemed to dominate the shelves. My friend had read Lockhart's *Life* every year for forty years. He always referred to Scott as 'Sir Walter,' as if he had known him. I have never met a man who knew the incidents of Lockhart and the lines of Scott's novels and poems as well as he did. Sometimes after dinner, he would talk of Scott with such love that we all felt that we knew the poet of Abbotsford as a friend. 'As Sir Walter said,' was the prelude to many of our talks, which rambled on from subject to subject, with no grim purpose, except that of making time alive and allowing our minds to browse in pleasant places. In the evening, the book-cases were far back in the dimness of the room. The focus of my friend's eyes was a painting of Our Lord, by Quintin Matsys. It stood upon a table, with a gentle light falling upon it. On either side there was a high vase of ivory lilies. In the autumn these were changed for maroon chrysanthemums. Those of us who knew the house well, sometimes felt that the picture was the governor of its life, from day to day. It showed us a face dignified in suffering . . . not Jesus the martyr or sentimentalist, but the saint and the teacher in the hour of death, with the shadow of His Father's hand upon His face.

The library in which the picture stood was big and square. You must imagine the illuminated circle in which we sat, about the open log fire. In the darkness beyond where we reclined there were tables covered with treasures. There was a gold snuff box which played a merry tune when it was opened,

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and a fat silver watch which had belonged to Flora Macdonald. In one case were Sir Walter Scott's fishing book, Dean Hobart's shoe-buckles, and twenty or more snuff-boxes, in tortoise-shell, gold, mother-of-pearl and ivory. Upon one high piece of German furniture, there were amusing figures of Scott and Byron, leaning upon small alabaster pedestals, and between them, a Dutch clock. Below its face there was a revolving column of glass which pretended to be water, issuing from the mouth of an ormolu lion. Upon the mantelpiece were ivory busts, two crystal candle-sticks and a clock which had the deepest and most pleasing chime of any I have ever heard. For the brief period when there was a telephone in the library (it was expelled in a brave and indignant moment, when a rude fellow wished to speak with us from Torquay about nothing at all, at midnight), it was possible to telephone the house from London at a minute to the hour and wait to hear the striking of the clock, feeling from its voice as if one were in the room.

From these objects in the outer darkness, come nearer to the lighted circle and feel the warmth of the log fire upon your hands and face. The circle was dominated by my friend. He was a listener as well as a talker and although he did not suffer bores gladly when he was tired, only those of us who loved him were able to detect the agony upon his face. He hid it behind a smile which was sweet for the bore to see, but a joke to those of us who know him well. The bore would not pause: nothing stemmed the

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tide of his banality and we would sit and watch the hand of the clock creep up towards ten, weary and slow : so slow that we trembled lest the young man from the shop in the town had forgotten to wind it when he came on the previous Friday. Imagine the bore departing in a final flutter of self-appreciation ! Then my friend would sink back into his chair again and say, ' Oh for the days, the days that are no more.'

He would light his pipe and we would subside into silence, until somebody leaped across the room towards him. ' You are on fire again !' The sparks from his pipe had made one more hole in his already worn and burned cassock. You must imagine his broad chest forever in peril from sparks, for his pipe was seldom laid aside.

We may come back again to the room and hear, with satisfaction, the banging of the door as the bore goes home. Imagine my friend approaching seventy, slightly bald. ' A lot of hair is a vulgar thing,' he would say in self-defence. Imagine him as a big man, fine in figure, with legs which once made the local station-master say to me, ' Well, there go the finest pair of legs in the Church of England.' Most people said that he was handsome. When you know a man well, you do not label him thus or even notice his face in comparison to others. I only knew that his eyes searched into the core of me, not consciously, for he was neither a suspicious nor a critical man, but because his were the eyes of a man who was above the faintest treachery. At seventy

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he could still act with the thoughtlessness and waywardness of a boy, but I never knew him expose a mean motive. The only man he ever judged was himself and this judgment was always harsh and sometimes tinged with despair. When we were alone, with the bore making his way down the hill, we seldom found that it was necessary to speak. Upon points of humour and honour we were in agreement, and a smile shared, with a glance of the eye, was enough for us to know the other's thought and feelings. Sometimes if the bore had been assiduous enough, the reaction at his departure would stimulate my friend to sing a song, with no sense of tune and ending upon a note which seemed to howl at its isolation, three and a half tones away from where the composer placed it. The verse would be :—

' Daisy, Daisy, give me your answer do,'

Or, more often,

Two love - ly black eyes,

Oh! what a sur - - prise!

On - ly for tell - ing a man he was wrong,

Two love - ly black eyes!

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If our visitor had perturbed us, with the kind of local gossip in which we never indulged when we were alone, I knew of one cure, one balm to our ruffled state. I would go over to the book-case and, finding it with ease in the dark, I would take down a volume of Browning's poems. I knew the page well: indeed, the old brown book usually fell open, knowing what we required of it, to page 257.

Then the voice we loved, would read

*... And I paused, held my breath in such silence
and listened apart ;
And the tent shook, for mighty Saul shuddered :
and sparkles 'gan dart
From the jewels that woke in his turban, at once
with a start
All its lordly male-sapphires, and rubies courageous
at heart.
So the head : but the body still moved not, still
hung there erect.
And I bent once again to my playing, pursued it
unchecked,
As I sang,—*

At the end would be silence again. My friend would knock out his pipe against a sturdy brass ash-tray. It had been made for him out of brass a quarter of an inch thick, because he broke every other tray we gave him. From a tall, silver-gilt vase he would take a feather. The pipe would be cleaned and placed with its companions, on a lower shelf, in the table

beside his chair. The big figure would rise. 'Well, an hour in my flea-bag before breakfast would be a good idea,' he would say. We too would stir in our chairs, but not soon enough. At the door he would turn and bark at us, 'Go to bed!' Then the light would be switched off so that we would be forced to stumble through the dark towards the door.

I cannot explain the accident which led me so often into the company of older people when I first came to London, unless it was that I drifted unconsciously along the avenues of my choice. In New Zealand we cling with affection and pride to the story of our English forebears. Already there is a little aristocracy in the new country and those of us (no matter how humble our colonial state), who can claim descent from the colonists of the 'forties, are vastly proud. My parents never tired of reminding me, when I was a child, that my ancestors had arrived in New Zealand in *The Duchess of Argyll*. A few portraits, a family Bible and the tales handed down to us from our grand-parents all bind us to our kinsmen with pleasant cords, although tangible ties with England may be severed. My Cornish name sustained me on many occasions as a child, when my pride and confidence might have been injured by the life about me. Sometimes, when the colonial comes home to claim his kinsmen, his advent may be looked upon as an intrusion. When England was a Roman colony, Sallust wrote, 'Poor Britons, there is some good in them after all—they produce an oyster.' The Englishman sometimes adopts the patronage of

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the Roman attitude and says, 'Poor New Zealanders, there is some good in them after all—they produce a lamb.' I have always found the English to be the least snobbish people in the world, although they are cautious and selective. It is not with feelings of either snobbery or intrusion that one comes to England, seeking the home of one's ancestors. Rather does one feel that at last one has been allowed to extend a hand through the centuries and touch the beginning of one's existence. When I first arrived in London, I was grave and exalted when one of my kinswomen invited me to her home. It was like the end of an exile, to be allowed to speak to somebody who knew of the Cornish villages and of the names which had been no more than dim words in the stories I had heard as a child. Our family records told me that my great grandparents had been married at Gulval. I went there when the slope towards the sea was radiant with spring flowers. I saw my name upon the monuments, in brass and in stone. When I returned to London I felt sensations of security which could never be dismissed as snobbish or superficial. I was part of Britain: part of her earth and of her history. I asked no more than this. It was in the house of my kinswoman that I met many very old people. She was herself somewhere in her eighties, a woman of great will, strong prejudices and rigid standards of living. Her position and her fortune were, to her, signs of responsibility to the life about her. A concert at the Queen's Hall and a play by Shakespeare were the

apex of her self-indulgence. Her talk was of Jane Austen's novels, which she read once a year. A piece of needlework usually hung from her hands as she sat, bolt upright, upon a high-backed chair. Smoking was not allowed in either the dining-room or the drawing-room and if I wished for a cigarette after luncheon, I was taken to the smoking-room at the back of the house. Here I engaged in my impropriety alone, until a servant came for me, to lead me back to the drawing-room where the old people were sitting. I shall never forget one day when I walked into the drawing-room, before luncheon, to be introduced to Dr. Spooner. Marriage had made him into a Bolitho relative and even the distance of half the world between England and New Zealand and the gap caused by many generations, estranged from their Cornish earth, were not enough to prevent me from feeling that I was also connected with him, at least in name. The uncertain, colonial winds could not shake me then, as I stood near to the old, old man who had given a word to the English language and a thousand jokes, as immortal and harmless as the limerick. Perhaps I was a little disappointed when he failed to tell us that he disliked bananas and preferred the old-fashioned night shirt. And I was certain, when I met him, that the story of his tipping his wife and kissing the railway porter on the station at Oxford was basely untrue.

Dr. Spooner was eighty-four years old when I met him. He had been born in 1844. I sat next to him at luncheon and listened to tales of old Oxford, of

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Dean Stanley of Westminster whom he had known ; tales of Jowett and of Matthew Arnold and, for my especial pleasure, recollections of scholars who had gone to New Zealand as missionaries, on the wings of the Oxford movement.

Almost every day, I was allowed to touch some old shadow in this way. The first time that I went to a private view at the Academy, I was invited to walk through the galleries with Mrs. Holman Hunt. I had been in London for only a few weeks and my taste was not cynical enough to cause me to look back with anything but pleasure to the day when Holman Hunt's *The Light of the World* was brought to New Zealand. I had been taken, as a child, to see the celebrated picture in an Auckland gallery. How gallant and elated I felt therefore, to be allowed to walk with the little old lady whose clothes and manner had nothing to do with my fussy century !

One evening, during my first year in London I was invited to the Garrick Club for supper and found myself sitting between Lord Frederick Hamilton and Canon Hannay who hides shyly behind the pen name of George Birmingham. The supper party was in celebration of the first night of *The Mermaid* for which Canon Hannay had written the book and Doctor Sydney Nicholson the music. Canon Hannay seemed to be a mild man to have written *Spanish Gold*. I had to wait some years before I found myself upon a ship, bound for Africa, with the leisure to read Lord Frederick Hamilton's enchanting books of recollections. He gave me

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many glimpses into his storehouse as we ate supper. His capacity as a raconteur was almost too great. The bell rang every time it was pressed. No dish could come on the table without a tale of some place in which he had eaten it before and no name was mentioned without his recalling an anecdote. Perhaps it is true that the gaps of silence prove the talents of a story teller ! But Lord Frederick Hamilton was amusing and kind. I was still young enough to be careful with my wine. I said ' No ' to the third glass and he was shocked. He told me of a friend who recalled his father at dinner in Scotland. Their orgies were so terrific that a small page was kept upon a stool beneath the table, to loosen the collars of the guests and prevent them from choking when they fell from their chairs. Numbered stretchers were lined up against the dining-room wall and as the guests achieved unconsciousness, the servants placed each one upon his allotted bier and carried him to his room.

Lord Frederick went on with his gay stories until he heard somebody mention my name. ' Bolitho ! That means that you are Cornish ! All Cornish people are liars and thieves.' He did not speak to me once more during supper.

I forgave him six years afterwards, when I read *The Vanished Poms of Yesterday*.

I did not find young Britons equally thrilled by these venerable figures. Perhaps familiarity had bred indifference ! A Londoner laughed at me one day when I waited in the King's Road for five minutes

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to see Ellen Terry come to the window of her house. A cluster of undergraduates took me for a fool in Cambridge, when I gaped with delight at the spick and span figure of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch, walking by the gate of Jesus. It seemed incredible to me that the writer of *From a Cornish Window* could deign to share the pavement with anybody as little as myself. Sometimes during these encounters, I felt that I was the last hero-worshipper left in the world.

Chapter Three

WE are told that hero-worship was a danger among the Victorians and that it was finally killed by the War, when men came to realise that Princes must prove their greatness in their humanity : that poets and painters were lost if they estranged themselves from the common sights and contacts which engender tolerance and kindliness. In religion also, more than virtue is expected of priests and moralists. Celibates and hermits are no longer convincing figures to us and it is thought to be more noble to wrestle with sin than to run away from it. Saints have been forced to step down from their dusty niches and live shoulder to shoulder with the mob. Sceptres, laurels and halos mean little in the violent tide of post-war realism. The golden age of hero-worship has passed.

Deprived of their gods, the company of sycophants have turned to more worthy occupations. There was no room for hero-worship after 1918. This desolation was surprising and then almost heart-breaking to me when I first came to England. In New Zealand, where the Governor-General, the Mayor and the Bishop were the only gilded people we ever saw breaking the sub-fusc monotony of our daily procession, name-worship was a delight to us. There were a few early associations in our history to bring great names to our doors. One could

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tramp at the heels of Samuel Butler's ghost, over the Canterbury hills, and see the 'most beautiful grass country in the world,' from which he imagined the settings of *Erewhon*. Mary Taylor, the Rose York of *Shirley*, had climbed a hill near to Wellington in the 'forties, to watch for a ship to carry her letter to Charlotte Brontë at Haworth. Charles Armitage Brown, who had tramped through the Lake country with Keats, had crossed the world in 1841 and he was buried in Taranaki. Alfred Domett, Browning's friend, had settled in the South. It was of him that Browning wrote :—

*What's become of Waring
Since he gave us all the slip,
Chose land-travel or seafaring,
Boots and chest or staff and scrip,
Rather than pace up and down
Any longer London town ?*

*. . . . How, forsooth, was I to know it
If Waring meant to glide away
Like a ghost at break of day ?*

Charles Meryon had lived on Banks Peninsula and some of his etchings (now in the British Museum and the library of the Athenæum) show the cabbage-tree palm, peculiar to our part of the world. In Sydney, there was a house in which Professor Gilbert Murray's mother had kept a school for young ladies. We passed it with awe. There was a man in Sydney who had dined with Stevenson

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at Vailima and in Auckland I often passed the house in which Mr Hugh Walpole was born, when his father was vicar of St. Mary's. Some of us who cared were deeply conscious of these slim threads which tied us to the world of great people. But distance turned the men themselves into shades which pleased us in a vague and dissatisfying way. The famous people who were our contemporaries came but rarely to our shores. It was a long way for them to travel, from England to our little group of islands at the bottom of the world. The Prince of Wales came in 1920 to thank us for our loyalty in the war. Lord Northcliffe called and said that we were more English than the English, which pleased us immensely. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle spent a few days with us and I had seen Sir Ryder Haggard drinking coffee in Auckland's smart hotel. Once, many years ago, as the mail boat was remaining only one day in Auckland, Sarah Bernhardt had stepped ashore to walk up our main street and try her prowess in our only shooting gallery.

We knew that the old world had given up hero-worship as grandmother's humbug, but waves of mass feeling spend many years in moving from one hemisphere to the other. We still recalled the old hate of our grandfathers by saying 'Fear God and hate the French,' and at school we made jokes about 'old Bony part.' Our ribaldry was that which our grandparents had taught us. We did not heed the quick changes which came to English fashion and, in 1918, we were still brought up to worship the great.

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Postcards of the King, the Marchese Marconi, Thomas Edison, Lilian Nordica, Marie Studholme, Ellen Terry, Sousa and Houdini were among my sacred possessions. Some were plain postcards, but the one of Marie Studholme, entering a cab, was gay with paint and tinsel. Perhaps there was danger in our devotion to great names. Older people have told me that hero-worship was almost a poison to the impressionable late Victorians.

The adulation of sycophants, curled up at the feet of men like Tennyson, Wordsworth, Thackeray and Watts, might have brought them destruction if within themselves, there had not been a capacity for work and an urge towards perfection which could not be undermined by adorers. The Victorians liked to exalt their gods. My contemporaries seem to find their delight in dragging them down. The generation, which stood upon chairs in Hyde Park to see Lily Langtry drive past, has faded with its century. Now, any man or woman who dares to rise to eminence is no more than an Aunt Sally for the missiles of the crowd. Only film stars and fliers are exempt from this attack. We are caught in a passion for which the Americans have invented a graphic word: the passion for *debunking*. Statesmen, poets and painters are ordinary working people and they are not allowed to become tipsy on the hero-worship of the crowd. There is a sad aspect in this change, for celebrated people are no longer thrilling to us. Beautiful women move in a mundane world of face-cream advertisements and

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cinematography. Fifty years ago, they would have been given the Victorian compliment of being placed in a specimen vase, to be worshipped, alone. Talent too passes only for what it is worth. Twenty women presenting a wreath of laurels to Mr. Siegfried Sassoon would appear ridiculous. If they curled up at the feet of Mr. Aldous Huxley, he would no doubt yawn and walk out of the room. We have become honest, but we have lost the harmless quality of Romance on the way. We would have done well if we had retained a little of it, instead of standing, stark-naked on the rocks of realism, with the winds of candour shrieking about us.

Even in the theatre, which might be the last stronghold of romance, it is not easy to find shrines to which one may take one's devotion. How can we believe in Juliet's cry,

O gentle Romeo, if thou dost love,

or in Desdemona's song—

The poor soul sat sighing by a sycamore tree,

when we see Juliet and Desdemona, an hour afterwards, eating creamed haddock in a supper room?

There is one figure in the theatre who holds the talent for illusion still, through some secret in herself. In an untidy age, Miss Marie Tempest moves with the elegance of one of Sargent's models, immaculate in her craft as well as her dress. When she

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walks across the stage, she makes other people look as if they have just come in from a long, windy charabanc ride. Her dresser will tell you that she is first to arrive at the theatre and that she spends an hour in her dressing-room before any other player appears. She will tell you that she never moves along the dusty way from her dressing-room to the stage, except in a long white cloak, covering her from neck to toe : that her eye is so keen, it knows if one of the two hundred coloured pins in the cushion on her table is missing. She will recall a phlegmatic, British school-boy, who once went into the dressing-room and kissed the great lady's hand, whispering afterwards to his friends, ' Why did I do that ? I have never done such a thing in my life before.'

The dresser could even relate stories of anger (of the stage-door keeper who described her as ' a holy terror '), and stories of fiery determination, before which both management and company have melted into silence and obedience. She might speak of her own devotion, which has weathered a hundred storms and only grown stouter for the experience. But she might not be able, even with her closer view, to gather the shreds of evidence together and tell you that they mean only this : that Miss Tempest's anger and determination are part of her demand for perfection, in an age when the second-rate easily passes muster : that through this talent she is surrounded by a wall so strange and wonderful that an intelligent young man who was

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once going to lend her a book, left it in a taxi-cab rather than hand it to her because he discovered on the way that some of the pages were freckled with the ash of a cigarette.

In 1918, I was in a training camp in New Zealand. The authorities had chosen the coldest and most desolate valley in the world for the encampment and all through the winter we shivered and stumbled over the flat stony ground, sustained by the pale promise that adventure and honour lay awaiting for us beyond the months of damp and indigestion. The encampment had high, dark hills for its background. The leafless trees were bent by the wind that came, fierce and icy, from the Antarctic. There was no beauty in the gaunt, cold valley. The preparation for death seemed more melancholy than death itself.

One evening we packed ourselves into a train and escaped from the encampment for twenty-four hours. We crossed the high hills; the grade was so steep that the engines were given a third, central rail, to which they clung with cog-wheels, to save them from crashing into the valley below. We came to Wellington, with its narrow streets and tall buildings, standing shoulder to shoulder, and its few theatres. Upon the face of one of them the name MARIE TEMPEST appeared. We had time to bath and change before we walked into the stalls, our self respect regained through hot water, a dinner jacket and good food. There were lights and warmth and we were already grateful. The play was

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Good Gracious Annabel and I recall the first sight of Miss Tempest. I suppose that I fell in love with her then.

The beauty of the theatre came to us in niggardly glimpses in New Zealand. Once, Adeline Genée came to dance for us as *Copelia*, and we had heard Ellen Terry's lovely voice, but only when she was vague and tired. When Marie Tempest raised her small white hand, the drab hills and the pebbles, driven against the tin huts of the training camp by the wind, were all forgotten. I recall none of the lines in the play. I knew only that Dubedat's cry, 'I believe in . . . the redemption of all things by beauty,' was whispered to me, once again.

I went back to the training camp. The armistice of 1918 came soon after and there was no need for me to cross the dark hills to find adventure and honour. I sank back into my little civilian groove again. In the years that followed, my love became more and more unreasonable. I crossed the Tasman Sea, to become literary editor and dramatic critic on the staff of an Australian newspaper. Although Miss Tempest had passed far from the Antipodes, I wrote articles about her and neglected the nearer stars. Her photograph appeared in my columns when she was acting in China, for no reason at all, except that this was the only kind of bouquet I could place at her feet.

Four years passed, as they might in a play. The curtain rises on a London scene, with myself grown older. Cynicism had stained some of the pages of

my creed, but my love had not changed. And then, I prospered through a kind accident. The preamble does not matter now. By the way of diplomacy and a little cleverness, for which my devotion must be my excuse, I was invited to luncheon with Miss Tempest and her husband, Mr. Graham Browne. There were two disastrous moments to shake the days of anticipation. My servant in London was the noble old Cockney, Mrs. A., who ruled me more than she served me. I had already entered the blessed appointment in my engagement book, which was kept on a table in the hall. *Luncheon, Mrs. Graham Browne.* Miss Tempest's secretary telephoned the day before *the day* to confirm the engagement, and Mrs. A. had taken the message.

'Miss Tempest telephoned, sir,' she said, 'to say that she hexpects you to lunch to-morrow. I looked in the hengagement book and I see that you are already hengaged to lunch with Mrs. Graham Browne.'

I explained to her, 'But Mrs. Graham Browne is Miss Tempest.'

'Ho, most hodd,' she answered.

I explained further. 'You see, Mrs. Graham Browne is the actress. Miss Tempest is her stage name.'

Mrs. A. did not approve. 'Ho, sir, an hactress! I had a niece once, sir, a nice girl, with a lovely suprary voice. But she changed her name to Gelatine or Genovive or something, went on the stage and married an hacrobat.'

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I was not deterred. The day came, rather splendidly. I think I ran to a carnation. I know that I went to my barber, to have every possible renovation performed upon my hair and my face. I smelled rather unpleasantly by one o'clock. The wretched man had anointed my hair with an evil scent and I drove to the Ivy restaurant with the feeling of being suffocated in an avalanche of gardenias. I opened the windows of the taxi-cab. Perhaps a little air might dilute the offence! When I arrived at the restaurant, my first ecstasy was swamped by my shame.

I ate my luncheon. How, I do not know. My hands trembled. I had many hands, it seemed, but they were oleaginous and useless. I felt like an octopus, suddenly asked to sit through a Lord Mayor's banquet. Perhaps it was that my devotion was stronger than my hair oil, for I was not dismissed for ever, although I have been chaffed upon the matter many times since. I ordered sole. I thought that, with the nervous state of my hands, sole was safe. I talked a great deal and felt, afterwards, that I had talked too much. In my nervousness, words tumbled out. But they fell into a pleasant shape, after all. Two secure and frank friendships began on that day and, with their beginning, this part of my story must end.

About four years ago, I began to help Miss Tempest to write her autobiography. Our collaboration was arrested at the fifth chapter, one dreary, grey day, in Sheffield. We worked in a sitting-room filled with



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Victorian gew-gaws, at a table covered in green woven chenille. There was a faithful aspidistra at one side. The early part of the book was written and re-written; remoulded, recalled and rejected. Alone in my bedroom in the dingy Sheffield hotel, I stamped up and down. I watched my indignant face in the wardrobe looking-glass. My beautiful prose did not please her: the collaboration was a failure. Only that afternoon, two pages of the 'early years' chapter went away with the tea tray and had to be saved from the dust bin at the back door of the hotel. The first sentence of the book was the only one which remained unchanged.

'I was the child of piety and gloom.'

Every time we went over the manuscript, we began with this, until it became ridiculous. I think we both realised, in simultaneous flashes of enlightenment, that the book could never be written in this way. I recall Miss Tempest's eyes, with a twinkle and a hint of tears; 'I can't go on,' she said.

Once more I tried to restore the collaboration. On this day I realised that no ghost could ever write Miss Tempest's autobiography and that if ever her story was to be told it must be in some other form. I had travelled from Cornwall to gather the material for a chapter of the book. It was a sunny day and Miss Tempest sat at luncheon, in her garden. I asked her a question. She did not hear me, for she was gazing beyond the trees.

I asked again. She still gazed at the lawn.

‘Look,’ she said, ‘a great spotted woodpecker!’

Mr. Graham Browne and I saw a bird hopping near to the umbrella tree. ‘No, not a great spotted woodpecker,’ said Mr. Graham Browne. ‘It is,’ said Miss Tempest. She went into the library and brought a book on birds and from then on, the biography was forgotten.

I learned one great lesson from the experience of working with Miss Tempest : the lesson of discipline. She showed me the dangers of ever allowing oneself to be foolishly deceived over any grain of talent one may possess. Nowadays, when fortune comes to writers overnight, it is wickedly easy to imagine that the wings of one’s miserable little talent are strong enough to sustain one against the erratic gusts of public taste. Miss Tempest taught me that neither the profit nor the success coming from such a lazy thought could ever bring satisfaction to one’s conscience as a workman. She revealed to me the adventure of work.

A little time before he died, Sir William Gilbert went to a garden party at Holland House. A young girl was brought up to him who wished to become an actress. He said to her, ‘There are three great actresses in the theatre to-day from whom you may learn something—they are Bernhardt, Duse, and our own Marie Tempest.’ It is not easy to judge or to estimate all three in the same light. Legends have grown up, like thickets, about the names of Bernhardt and Duse and we imagine their work to have grown out of temperament and talent. Miss Tempest

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always scorns any suggestion that her acting has flourished on either of these qualities. Someone once asked her if she felt very deeply or lost control during her great emotional scene in *Little Catherine*. She snapped indignantly, 'No.' She revealed all her plan of work in her next comment. 'It would make me very angry if I were unable to add up my house books in the back of my mind during any scene in a play.'

It is a wonderful experience to know a woman celebrated for her talents, who still looks upon her acting as calmly as a craftsman with his tools. One is sent back to one's manuscript with a new kind of conscience and, crowning all, a glimpse of the adventure that lies in trying to express a thought in words: an adventure so wonderful and satisfying, that neither reviewers nor readers of one's books may molest one on the way.

From the beginning, Miss Tempest's story is of discipline. Like Queen Victoria, she knows what is right and what is wrong, and she does not allow the word 'expedient' or the phrase 'it will do' to come into her thoughts. She will spend an hour making up for her part. Then, while others are hurrying into the theatre, bustled and late, she sits at her table, playing patience. Like everything else she does, this is a rule. From two games of patience, she walks on to the stage, calm and prepared for her work.

Miss Tempest's story opens in London, in the 'sixties. (The first man who ever raised his hat to

her was Sir Robert Peel, the younger, riding down Whitehall in a blue cut-away coat with brass buttons, and yellow gloves). After being educated in Belgium and then in Paris, Marie Tempest returned to London and to her formidable grandmother in Whitehall. She must have been a wonderful old lady. On her death-bed, she sent for her granddaughter and said, ' Mary, I am going to my Maker. I shall not see you again. Dress well, my child, remember that ! You will never be anything without it.'

Miss Tempest was taught to sing at the Royal Academy of Music by Garcia. She has described her training under the famous master. ' The first day that I went to him, I was wearing a smart Stuart tartan dress, with quite a thousand buttons and a black satin sash. My hat was black with big feathers.

' I advanced towards Garcia : an odd little man, almost eighty years old. I sang the Aria from *Ernani*. When it was over, he said, " I suppose that you think you can sing." '

' I answered " Yes." '

' He looked at my waist. " How big is that—that waist ? " '

' " Nineteen inches," I whispered.'

' " Then, before I can teach you, take off those corsets and come back here with more waist." '

' I went home and did as I was told. Garcia's methods were brutal. His father used to whip him to make him sing and he handed the treatment on

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to his own pupils. For two years, he threw things at me and for two years I cried and cried. For two years he brought his horrible quill pens to the pianoforte and dug the points into my music until the pages were all holes. In the end I was allowed to sing at a concert in St. James's Hall.'

Garcia was pleased with his pupil. Encouraged by success, she horrified her grandmother by saying that she wished to become an actress. The old lady answered. 'There is only one thing, my misguided child. I'll see what Mrs. Gladstone can do.'

Miss Tempest was taken in a hansom-cab to No. 10 Downing Street. Mrs. Gladstone raised her mittened hands in horror when Marie Tempest's grandmother told her story. 'Not the stage, oh not the *stage*,' she cried. 'I must ask William to speak to her.' Then the great man came into the room, and he talked of the theatre. At first, he forgot his mission. He talked of the Greek drama, of the Monkish Mysteries and Moralities and of the Restoration drama and then, at the end, he deplored the advent of women on the stage.

Mrs. Gladstone beamed. 'William, you are wonderful.' But the moral of the lecture was lost on the child and only the memory of Gladstone's charm and voice remained. This time, the Grand Old Man's oratory fell upon unheeding ears. Miss Tempest left No. 10 and, not long afterwards, she played her first part, in *Boccaccio*. She became a star overnight. Never once in the long story of her acting, has the discipline relaxed. In work, in

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dress, in rest and in amusement, she is dominated by a sense of time and a passionate dislike of substitutes. In short, her talent is the talent for perfection and in this lies the reason why, in the time when the stage does not breed stars, she remains a star in the same sense as the great people of the Victorian age, when hero-worship was part of the national creed.

Chapter Four

A LITTLE experience of life in London soon robbed me of any early desire I had for meeting literary lions. There were only four men among living writers whom I wished to see : Mr. Bernard Shaw, D. H. Lawrence, George Moore and Mr. Maurice Baring. In the fat comfort of middle-age, I am still proud of my choice. I met all four, during the early months of my life in England, but they passed me by with little acknowledgment of my devotion. The first day I was in London, I was to meet a powerful publicist. His office was in the Adelphi and I was waiting outside his door, when I heard the crash of iron upon iron above me. I looked first to the left and saw a name-plate, *Mr. Bernard Shaw*. Then I looked up and saw a tall, agile man descending towards me. This crash of iron upon iron had been the closing of his frightening gate, half-way up the staircase. The figure of my adoration came nearer and nearer. Please enjoy with me the sensation of a colonial youngster, flung into the cool hall of a beautiful Adelphi house, still young enough to have blinked with astonishment at the lights of Leicester Square the night before, suddenly confronted by Mr. Bernard Shaw ! Should I go up to him and say, ' Excuse me, Mr. Shaw, but I once acted in *How He Lied to Her Husband* and the *New Zealand Herald* said that I did it very well ' ? Could

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I tell him about the amateur productions in an Auckland garret, and of how I had improvised as I acted, because the 'husband' forgot to bang my head against the wall ; a movement upon which the lines of the play hinge for some seconds afterwards ?

I waited in dumb wonder. This was true, for all the floods of hero-worship within me had been waiting for the four men who had guided me away from the Yellow Book company : Wilde and Beardsley and their kind, who had captivated me in the doldrums of my teens. Mr. Shaw came to the last step and then to the floor upon which I stood. The tyrant smiled at me as if he expected to find me there. He paused, as he opened the swinging doors, and said, ' Good morning.' There was no fierceness in his eyes : no rough riding over the affection which must have been apparent on my face. The two words were enough to allow me to know the beauty of his voice. Still smiling, he passed out into the Adelphi.

Many years afterwards, I was staying at *Hamels* on Boar's Hill, with Sir Frederick and Lady Keeble. As Lillah McCarthy, Lady Keeble had acted in many of Shaw's early plays at the Court Theatre. One evening after we had been talking before the fire, Lady Keeble gave me a bundle of Mr. Shaw's unpublished letters to read in bed. She had been speaking of him for almost an hour : of his power as a producer, of his kindness and of his humour. I read the letters long into the night, perhaps one

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hundred letters, full of stage directions, bitter little criticisms, softened by following sentences of encouragement. It was pleasant to feel after these intimate hours with him, that my devotion was unchanged. The letters have given me the sensation of knowing him well. When fools talk about him, of his supposed love of publicity, his cruelty and of his revolutionary notions, I smile somewhere down in the comfortable recesses of my stomach and feel that I know more than they do. It is curious and pleasant to be so certain that I have lived with him and know him well, with nothing more than a ' Good morning,' tossed to me in kindness on my first day in London, when I needed it so much.

I hurried into the office of the publicity man. He was kindly, plump and soft-voiced. He rose from behind his desk and extended his hand. ' Welcome to England ! ' he said. ' And tell me, what is your ambition, Mr. Bolitho ? '

I felt that something was expected of me. I should answer, ' To become Lord Mayor of London, sir,' but I confessed that I had no ambition, which was true.

*Let those who are in favour with their stars,
Of public honour and proud titles boast,
Whilst I . . .*

I could not very well tell the kind man that whatever shred of ambition I had ever had was realised upon his own door-step, whilst I was waiting to see him.

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When I had been in London about two weeks, I was asked to dine at Hampstead and meet Mr. and Mrs. D. H. Lawrence. My host was Mr. John Middleton Murry. I walked to his house through my first fall of English snow. In the northern part of New Zealand we sometimes saw snow, remote upon the crests of the mountains, but it never came close to our doors. As I walked up through the Hampstead streets, past the tightly-packed London houses, I knelt down and made my first snowball. It grew into a monstrous thing in my hands. When I arrived at Mr. Murry's house, I placed the snowball on one side, suddenly aware of how foolish I would seem to the servant who opened the door. I was dumb with shyness as we ate our dinner. When I did manage to speak, I chattered like a fool. After dinner, we walked down a winding, white lane to Lawrence's house. In a shaded, pleasantly shabby room, we found Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence sitting before a fire: she in a straight-backed chair, Lawrence curled up on a sofa. I think now that he must have guessed at my terror for he uncurled himself and walked with me towards the window. The curtains were still apart. The still, white scene outside calmed me and I was able to talk with him. He was patient with the gauche colonial, but I felt very small and obscure. It seemed, as I stood there, that my English adventure was to be a failure. I had crossed the world, confident that standards would be clear-cut and that the way to happiness would be defined. I had found the alternatives in

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England to be as perplexing as they were in New Zealand and I had already come to realise that there was as much fine courage in the New Zealand people who did not read books, as there was in the river of chattering amateurs in the Café Royal ; indeed more courage, for the New Zealanders did not pretend.

Lawrence's little voice said to me, ' And you wish to write ! '

I answered ' Yes.'

' Then,' he said, ' you must be willing to leave London and all the people you have met. You must go away and be content to live on three pounds a week.'

We returned to the warm radius of the fire and Mrs. Lawrence gave us tea with whisky in it. I was left out of the conversation then. The talk hovered about their mutual friends. They spoke with assurance and they spoke quietly and I knew that I had failed even to interest them.

As I walked home through the snow, I felt foolish, second-rate and cowardly. There was not enough courage in me to carry me away, to live in a corner on three pounds a week. I clung affectionately to comfort and I knew, when I was alone in my room in Chelsea, that I was still dependent upon people and warmth and good food and not brave enough to follow the way Lawrence had shown to me.

My meeting with George Moore was a flimsy experience. But it pleased me. My copies of his books are so worn that their bindings are coming

to pieces. It is an old loyalty which began before I had any sense of criticism ; when I was very young and wholly appreciative. I never believe that devotion to an artist is an excuse or even a reason for wishing to meet him. To meet an actress one admires, or to break through barriers and wish to know a man because he paints well, or because his books please one, has always seemed to me to be an impertinence. In his work he gives you as much of himself as he wishes you to possess. To force oneself past that mark is an indecent intrusion, like bursting into a bathroom when it is engaged. I never tried to meet George Moore, but when I learned which was his house in Ebury Street, I often crossed the road as I walked past, so that I could make my mental genuflection at his door. I was living in Belgrave Street then. (The illusion of Chelsea did not last for very long). Ebury Street was near by, so that I felt Mr. Moore was almost my neighbour. One day, as I was walking past, the door of number 121 opened. George Moore walked out, sneezed viciously, glared at me, and climbed into a taxi-cab. That was all ! Similar disappointment came with the fourth object of my young affections. One summer I was staying in a beautiful old castle on the shores of the Beaulieu Firth. Its red stone towers rose above dark trees and the local tradition was that the walls had been built by William the Lion. While the more lusty members of the house party went out shooting, I lazed in the cool garden or rode over the moors,

working out the plan for a novel. One evening, I went down to the drawing-room, to find a new guest standing before the fire. He was the Master of Lovat,* then in his teens. He stood against a blazing fire, in his kilt, his elbows resting on the mantelpiece, waiting for Raeburn to paint him. (The next time I saw him, Dame Laura Knight might have painted him. He was trying to ride a buck-jumping pony in a circus near Oxford). He had come over from Beaufort for the day. He tried his shooting talk upon me and soon saw that I was not very good at it. Then he realised that I was 'the writer who is staying in the house,' and, with better manners than I had shown over his shooting talk, he gallantly turned the conversation on to books.

'We've got a couple of writers staying with us, Ronnie Knox and Maurice Baring. Do you know them?' he said.

To be devoted to Mr. Maurice Baring is not plain sailing. I am told that in the midst of your most devout obeisance, he will balance a wineglass on his head or dive into a pool. But I did not know this then and I confessed my worship.

The Master of Lovat said, 'Then come over to-morrow and meet him.'

There were many people at Beaufort. It was a Sunday afternoon and they seemed to drift in and out in misty groups, like relatives and friends in a Scandinavian play. The Master of Lovat led me up to Mr. Maurice Baring and made a pleasant

* The present Lord Lovat.

remark about my wish to talk with him. Mr. Baring said, 'Come for a walk in the garden.' I admit that I was enthralled. At a moment of uncertainty in my life, I had discovered Maurice Baring's *Puppet Show of Memory* in an Australian bookshop. It had crystallised the regard which his novels had awakened in me and I was ripe for a miracle to happen, to reward me for my constancy. I ran around the inside of my brain to find a remark, but the room was empty. My tongue was dry and I was afraid. He hurried forward and I ran at his heels. I felt that I was already upon his list of fools and that hope was past. We walked down an herbaceous border and every time I drew my breath in, to make a remark, he leapt forward and picked a dead flower head. They slowly made a pile on his open hand. At the end of the border, he placed them in a tidy heap, where the gardener could discover them next morning. There was a gap before we came to the next flower bed. Perhaps there, upon the stretch of lawn, I might say, 'I have always admired your work so much—it means so much to me! I too have known the joy of May nights, "loud with the jubilee of nightingales and aromatic with lilac."' But he was away in two jumps, and bending over some tired flowers. Their dead heads were nipped off one by one. I was forgotten. Once I tried to insert myself between him and the border. *I have always admired your work.* . . . The words were almost past my throat and upon my tongue, when he said, 'Do you like grapes?'

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I answered, 'Yes, very much.' I followed him then into a glass-house. He picked a small bunch of green grapes and held them out for me to take one, which I did. Then he ate all that were left. Again I was forgotten.

'Do you like ratting?' he asked.

I said 'Yes.' We scurried off to the stables and there my phrases of adulation were lost for ever. Sheets of iron were turned over, dogs were urged into dark recesses, boys shouted and piles of straw were scattered. Armed with a big stick, Mr. Baring joined in the bedlam. Half-an-hour afterwards I found myself walking in a far corner of the walled garden with a large lady in a flowery, muslin dress.

'Lady Lovat says that you write. Well, that must be a charming thing to do. Do you know Maurice Baring? He is staying in the house. He writes, of course. Very well, they say. But I have never read any of his books. I knew him when he was a boy and that makes all the difference. We must see that you meet him when we go back for tea. He is very vague,—artistic temperament, you know, but very kind.'

All this happened in September. Two days before Christmas, my morning post included a surprise. There was a copy of *French Literature*, and on the top was written, 'With best wishes from Maurice Baring.'

It was during this visit to Scotland that I met my first American hostess. In New Zealand, we seldom saw anybody from the big, new country, and while

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we sniffed at the Australian's willingness to accept American influences, we eschewed their fashions and even their music and remained stubbornly English. An American woman had taken a shoot near to Inverness. I had not seen her, but tales of her quaintness had been told to me: none more alarming than the story of her first shoot. She had declared that everything shot by her American guests on the first day was to be sent to the Inverness hospital and all that arrived was a keeper who had been peppered by a wild gun-man from Boston. The story was no doubt exaggerated, but we told it with gusto and I waited for the day when I was to meet her. The day came and I found myself walking along the shores of the Beaully Firth with a gorgeous woman, heavy with furs and dripping with pearls. Her friendliness softened a flamboyant and surprising exterior. 'You know, Mr. Bolitho,' she told me, 'I have not always been able to take a shoot in Scotland like this, because my husband and I began at the bottom of the ladder. Then one day, he cornered tallow and we never looked back.'

On the moors, she was full of surprises. She sometimes almost wept for 'the poor little birds' and when she did come out to join the guns for luncheon, tables, a cane chair and an awning were brought, together with a meal before which an alderman might groan. About this time, I had published my first novel and it had enjoyed a little success. The American woman had not read it,

but the most obscure, 'real live author' was not to be despised and I was bidden to dine. Her method of introduction, in the sedate house where the Prince Consort had once been a guest, was rather embarrassing. I walked into the drawing-room to find about eighteen people and among them, a celebrated doctor from America who was attending my hostess at the time. As she led me up to him, she drawled in a loud voice, 'Oh, Mr. Bolitho whose novel was such a success this spring, I want you to meet Dr. —, who is the most famous bladder specialist in New York.'

The conventional English servant has not been as willing as his master in accepting the American invader and some terrible stories of intimidation are told of callous butlers and gardeners in Scotland, who have reduced the bewildered tenants to tears. I heard of one woman from Philadelphia who was so afraid of the old gardener in her rented house, that she used to slink out at night and take her own flowers, concealed in a violin case.

The social reformer complains loudly against the tyranny of the master who tramples his servant under foot. But nobody ever seems to speak for the master who is browbeaten by his servant. Yet such there are : tyrants whose dominion in the greenhouse, the potting shed and the rose garden is such that frightened mistresses hide their scissors in their pockets when they are confronted by them ; as if they were guilty children, hiding fingers smeared with jam. I have been told of a tiresome American

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woman who rented a house in Devonshire. Her enemies attached the well known old story to her : that she had ordered two statues for her London house, ' one of Apollo and one of Apollinaris.' The joke was old and she did not deserve it. But she used some sickly phrases. Crocuses, she described as ' the harbingers of spring.' She was enthralled when she found the first crocuses flaunting their yellow bonnets above the earth. The gardener's name was Mullet and his treatment of her was nothing less than brutal. He ' snubbed ' her. She told the agent as much on the last, sad day of her departure when she faced him in his London office and banged his glass-topped table until her reflection in it shivered, as if in water.

Mullet had watched her from behind a bank of rhododendrons. He had already made up his mind that she should never see them in flower. He watched her callously. He saw her clasp her hands before the crocuses (' the darling croci ' she called them). ' The dear little things, isn't it marvellous ? ' he had heard her say. He had seen her run into the house and return with an earthenware bowl. He had seen her dig up the golden crocuses, with malicious prods from a trowel. He had watched her place them in the bowl, saying, ' There, you little beauties, I hope you'll like your new home.' Mullet saw her lift the bowl and carry it across the lawn. She left it on the steps of the house while she went in to wash her hands.

It was then that Mullet leapt out from behind the

rhododendron bushes. Indeed, the crocuses were back in the garden and the empty bowl was on the verandah before she came out again. Mullet no longer hid behind the rhododendrons. He tied up some straggling shrub, in an open place where she could see him.

This was what brought her to London and this was why she banged the glass-topped table in the agent's office. 'Either he goes, or I go,' she said, the blister pearls in her ears quivering in time with her own indignation. 'I'll allow no servant of mine'

'I am sorry,' answered the agent, 'but my client would never think of Mullet merely as a servant. You see, he has been there for thirty years.'

The woman was adamant. 'Well, it's either tenant or gardener. Your client must make his choice.' So it was that Mullet stayed in Devonshire. He saw the rhododendrons bloom, all by himself. He stood before the big ivory blossom with a cerise heart, his hat in his hand, smiling with joy.

One of the kindest American hostesses who ever came to England was Mrs. Hoffman who rented Blickling Hall, Lord Lothian's house in Norfolk. Some years ago, she allowed me to invite my own friends to Blickling for a week-end. I was awestruck by the privilege of being allowed to possess a great house for three days: by the security and richness imparted to me by a hundred rooms and a park in which Anne Boleyn is said to have wandered as a child. These sensations of power are no

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doubt subdued in an Englishman, but to a New Zealander, born within sight of wooden villas, the joy was unbounded. My excitement was intensified because I was to sleep in the room celebrated because Anne Boleyn's ghost was said to walk across its carpet at dead of night. At that time, my home was in Windsor and as Henry the Eighth's ghost haunted the cloisters, I felt that I was being drawn into a violent chapter of history. My week-end was full of surprises more terrifying than ghosts. Mrs. Hoffman had been swept off to a nursing home and the duties of host fell upon me. The week-end began with a luncheon party of thirty, for she had invited other guests in addition to my friends. Among them was Mr. Augustine Birrell and between trying to spend as much time as I could in talking with him, for he was an exciting person for a young colonial to meet, and arranging a big table plan for the first time in my life, I was nervously wrecked. This was not all. Mrs. Hoffman had invited a hundred people to come in the afternoon, to hear Prince George Chavchavadze play the piano. She had printed programmes and had announced that I would read 'some of my poetry' between the groups of the music. There was no withdrawal. After Prince George's brilliant playing of Mozart, Beethoven and Chopin, I was forced to stand up and recite two poems which I had written many years before. What my patient listeners thought to be deep feeling was nervous quivering. Some men, may find it easy to stand up before a

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hundred people and read their verses. For me it is an ordeal, both painful and terrible. The test put upon me did not end there. On Sunday, Mrs. Hoffman remembered that she had been asked to open a Baptist Church which had lately been restored, in a near-by field. A message came from the nursing home. 'Would Mr. Bolitho please open the church in her place?' I was still an obedient guest and, giddy with fear, I set off after luncheon on Sunday and met the good Baptists, waiting for me at the door of their little church.

'A turn of the key,' I thought and it will be over. But the clergyman whispered in my ear, 'Do you mind if you give your address outside, before the Church is opened?' Like a soldier, for whom death is certain, I flung myself into the thickest part of the battle. I stood up in a howling wind and spoke for ten minutes.

I stumbled into the motor car when it was all over. I stumbled through the doorway of Blickling, almost demented. It is not every man who is asked to spend a quiet week-end in the country and finds that he must read his own poetry to a hundred people and next day open a Baptist Church. One person in the house was sympathetic. Prince George Chavchavadze took me up to the library when it was all over and closed the door. There he played to me for almost an hour. The peace which poetry and religion had dispelled returned to me with his music and I fell back in deep sleep.

Chapter Five

ON either side of the fire-place of my sitting-room in London, there is a small black and gilt frame. In one of them are three Stuart seals and in the other, a copy of a drawing which is associated with my first stumbling adventure as an antiquary. The drawing is of Keats and the original is now in the National Portrait Gallery. The copy of the Keats drawing was the first possession which I unpacked when I arrived in London and went to live in my flat in Chelsea. I remember the deference of my servant, Mrs. A., with whom you are already acquainted. 'I suppose that is very hold, sir.'

I told her that the original drawing was made about one hundred years ago.

'Well,' she answered, 'I saw something much holder than that when I was a parlour-maid at the British Museum. A gentleman took me one day and pulled hup the blind to show me the Magnum Carter and that's hold if you like.' I was suitably humble, but I still treated my drawing of Keats as a treasure and I consoled myself with its story.

Somewhere else I have written of the link between Keats and New Zealand, through Charles Armitage Brown, who went to the colony in a wind-jammer in 1841. Brown and Keats had shared both work and pleasure in their friendship. They had tramped the Lake Country and they had stayed in Shanklin,



Pencil drawing of Keats by Charles Armitage Brown
(Now in the National Portrait Gallery)

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working on *Otho the Great*, for which one gave the idea and the other the diction and verse. It seems that Charles Armitage Brown began life as a Russian merchant, but he turned to writing when his fortune was made and he wrote the libretto for an opera which was produced at Drury Lane and the first considerable book treating Shakespeare's sonnets from the autobiographical point of view. He was also an artist and when he went to New Zealand some years after Keats's death, he took with him a pencil sketch which he had made of the poet, one day after they came in from walking. It is not easy for us to understand what stirred people like Samuel Butler, Charles Armitage Brown, Alfred Domett and Charlotte Brontë's friend, Mary Taylor, to leave the peace of their life in England and brave the monotony and discomforts of the long voyage and the final hazards of life in a primitive country. Samuel Butler and Mary Taylor did not stay; they returned to England. But Charles Armitage Brown made his life in New Zealand and in his wake his descendants worked unselfishly for the good of the new country. When I was a boy in Auckland, not always loving the colonial life about me, I treasured these stories of the early days. It was comforting for a boy in the Antipodes to know that there were a few slim threads of association between himself and the poets, who had not always thought of ploughs and frozen mutton and butter fat. I was still very young when I was told about the drawing of Keats which was in the possession of Charles

Armitage Brown's grandchildren in Auckland. One day, I walked from the main street, with its trams and proud new buildings (the street which had been no more than a stream, with shanties on its edges when Keats was alive) into the bank in which the grandson of Charles Armitage Brown was working. It was strange to talk with him of the poet and his friend and then go out into the street again and mix with the busy stream. It was stranger still when I went next time and, leaning over the counter, saw two or three of the pocket volumes of Shakespeare which Brown and Keats had carried with them on their journey through the Lake Country. Auckland possessed other, more celebrated links with the literary history of England. There was a collection of glorious illuminated manuscripts in the library, bought by Sir George Grey in the early days: the manuscripts which Froude had seen when he went to New Zealand. And there were examples of the First and Second Folios of Shakespeare as fine as any in the world. But now I was on my own adventure among old books and papers and if my young mind exaggerated the importance of my quest, it did not diminish the delight I felt, touching a little book which Keats himself had touched and *read*. When Brown's grandson told me that I might reproduce the drawing of Keats for the first time, and surround it with an article, I enjoyed the sensation of being . . . may I say, an antiquary, for I used the word then, with confidence. The drawing was reproduced in *Art in Australia* and for the first

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time letters came to me from scholars in the old world. There was a depressing aftermath. Some months later the drawing appeared in *The Observer*, with an article written by Sir Sidney Colvin, telling the story of the portrait but making no acknowledgment of its first publication. A friend in London wrote to the editor of *The Observer* and in his answer, written in a letter and not in the columns of the newspaper, Sir Sidney Colvin admitted that he had known of the first appearance of the drawing, in Australia all the time. I was still raw enough to be disappointed, but the wish to discover was strong in me and I sought for the grave of Brown which was in Taranaki. It had been lost during the barricading of a hill in the Maori war. The Mayor of New Plymouth set about the hill with spades and, on a day pleasantly near to the poet's birthday, the grave was found. In the old world, which is rich with memorials and associations, the unearthing of Brown's grave was not a matter of great importance. But to us, it was an event for celebration. The descendants of Brown made the last, generous gesture in memory of their distinguished ancestor. They gave the pencil portrait to the National Portrait Gallery, and afterwards, they presented their grandfather's diary of the voyage to New Zealand to the Keats Museum in Hampstead.

I wrote earlier in my book of a friend who was imprisoned in New Zealand and who later lived and died in Europe. When he went into the dark prison there must have been a kindly angel watching over

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him for one of the first duties which was given to him as a prisoner was to climb the slopes of Marsland Hill and clean the weeds from the grave of Charles Armitage Brown. I think he was sentimental enough to have been pleased by his labour, for he was a diligent reader of poetry. He was blessed with a good memory and a quiet, melodious voice and he was able to share his poetry with others. One of my first recollections of him is of a day in his study when I was still very young and untutored. I sat deep in a chair and listened to him reading :—

*Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard
Are sweeter ; therefore, ye soft pipes, play on.*

It must have been a benison to him, in the first bitter weeks of his imprisonment, to enjoy even this faint link with the poet who had given him so much pleasure when he was free. When he came to London, we went one day to the National Portrait Gallery to see the drawing of Keats which hangs there, in great dignity. The story of walking into the bank in Auckland is important now only to myself, as I sit in my London room and see the copy of the drawing of Keats beside my fire. It gave me my first sensation of forging a link with antiquity, even though the time concerned was little more than a century. I have touched many celebrated manuscripts since then. I have fingered Walpole's own catalogue of his library at Strawberry Hill and I have touched the initials which Shakespeare

Claremont
Den 23^{ten} Feb. 1820

Mein lieber Cousin,

Ich schicke Dir ein
französisches Buch. Gib
einen Kuß an Onkel Ernst
von

Deiner Cousine
Victoria.

Queen Victoria's first letter to Prince Albert

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scratched on the wall at Windsor. I have turned over the playing cards with which, it is said, Queen Anne once played, and I have seen the fairy flag at Dunvegan. One evening, in Coburg, I was shown the first letter written to Prince Albert by Queen Victoria, when she was a little girl. It had never been published* and it lived in a pink folder in which it had been placed by Prince Albert, more than a hundred years before. I have sat beside the fire at Bowood, with Bessy Moore's scrapbook. None of these pleasures has compared with the delight of reproducing a portrait of Keats for the first time. I felt that my uncertain colonial life, my ignorance and my youthfulness were all swamped by the dignity of being an antiquary.

*The letter is reproduced, for the first time, opposite page 88.

Chapter Six

IN the spring of 1928, I went to live at Windsor to make a book out of some Victorian letters which had been discovered there. For some years I worked among nineteenth century documents, discovering old letters which had lain in bundles, unread since the days in which they were written. Since one's labour is closely knit into one's daily life, I have found myself being led back rather than forward in my tastes, recalling what happened yesterday rather than anticipating what may happen to-morrow.

Living with older people has obliged me to see death about me too soon. One whom I may call a friend used to ask me to walk with him in the park at Windsor. He touched his ninety-second year and died while I was still bracing my shoulders with the energy of my thirties. I have been to the hundredth birthday party of a soldier who had been patted on the head by George the Fourth. The soldier was Sir George Higginson and he celebrated his achievement with an afternoon party in his house at Taplow. A gay dance band played in one room. The house was alight with young people and the flimsy, flowered dresses of summer. In the centre of the noise and colour, Sir George Higginson sat upon a sofa. One was too much aware of his hundred years to feel that he belonged to the scene. A soldier who had seen Queen Victoria as a bride did

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not seem to have ears for a twentieth-century jazz band. But his old eyes were merry and his crinkled fingers moved eagerly to shake hands with the young debutantes, as they moved towards the dance floor. I was allowed to sit upon the sofa beside him. While the band played a Strauss waltz, Sir George told me of the Prince Consort arriving at Windsor as a boy in his twenties. He had ridden with him, among the oaks and rhododendrons of the Great Park and he spoke of him intimately, as if he were still alive. 'He was the handsomest young man I ever saw,' Sir George told me. 'He did not ride very well because I think he did not enjoy it. Anyway, the Queen always liked him to stay at home.' It was not easy for me to fling myself back into my daily life and dance a tango, after being so near to this man whose memory embraced almost a century.

Another man whom I met in his hundredth year was Mr. Ernest Noel who was born in the summer of 1831. He remembered a black ribbon being put on his hat for the funeral of William the Fourth. He had travelled about Bath in one of the last of the sedan chairs and he recalled the entire Fleet coming up the Solent under sail. I was taken to meet him at his house near Worthing. He was still so handsome and vigorous that I had to say to myself, 'One hundred years, one hundred years,' to counteract the impression of youthfulness made on me by his puffing cigar and a near-by copy of *The Times* which he had been reading without his spectacles. These fine old Englishmen helped me

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to comprehend English life : its continuity and its solidity. It was not because they said anything wise that they helped me. They were members of old families who inherited their names and the responsibilities of their class with as grave a sense of duty as princes. Their breed had almost passed when I came to England, but there were enough of them to talk to me patiently and make me understand the law of inherited responsibility which flourished in the days of the landed gentry.

Most of the distinguished men who walked in the parks of Windsor and Eton were calm and secure in the wisdom of their sixties and seventies. It was a privilege to live on the fringe of their life, being allowed to speak with them, to walk with them, and to use their studies as retreats from the cleverness and fuss of London. The privilege lay in being allowed to meet men like Doctor Montague James, Canon Nairne and, before he died, Canon Dalton. I should like to write of these three men, for I do not imagine that any one of them knew how deeply he influenced me, through what he told me and by his example. Sometimes, on a dreary winter afternoon, I would walk through the cloisters and pull the old iron ring which awakened the bell in Canon Nairne's house. The young, who claim discovery and eagerness as their right, can never know the excitement of an older man's enthusiasms. I might have imagined with my few years and my young arrogance, that it was I who gave the light to our little feast. But, as we sat at tea, I used to feel like

a tired tramp who has come suddenly upon the silver light and the startling smell of the sea. A new book would be picked up from the table. (It lay near to a box of plump, Balkan cigarettes). The pages would be opened by fingers that had long lost the impatience of youth. I would listen to a verse or a phrase, curled about some fresh thought which had been thrown upon the world by a newcomer in writing. The thought was never too 'new' to awaken the enthusiasm of Canon Nairne, who had not become warped through being a cleric nor embittered by what we call 'the lessons of life.' His voice became eager as the voice of a boy as he read to me, and as quick as the voice of a boy, save when it paused to enjoy a long, beautiful word, like *vermilion*, or a short, ringing word, like *joy*. He read as the lover of words and his voice revealed his devotion.

Earlier in the day he had perhaps been abroad in the fields near Windsor with his sketch book. Sometimes I saw him about the countryside, in his black cape and broad black hat, and I was always pleased when I was strong-willed enough to creep past without disturbing him, leaving him alone as he wished to be. Sometimes, with a little persuasion, I could induce him after tea to open the new page of his sketch book. It was never a careful, tidy drawing which he showed me. It might be a view of the castle, noble and high, with the Thames meandering at its feet; or fragmentary notes he had made of a curve in the river, of a kingly elm, or

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of geese, paddling in a field. In all the sketches, there was something of the dash and excitement of a young artist rather than the mind of an older man, heavy with recollections.

His tea seemed to taste different from any other tea. Taking a cigarette from him was touched with a little ceremonial, for nothing that happened in his presence could be incidental to his guest. The room in which we sat had walls six feet thick, descending upon one side to the town of Windsor, one hundred feet below. The clock which reminded me regretfully that it was half-past six and time to go home, chimed from the curfew tower in the west wall of the castle: the bell of which Gray wrote when he heard the knell of parting day from the churchyard at Stoke Poges.

It was not always at Windsor that I saw Canon Nairne. He is Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge and he divides his life between the cloisters at Windsor and the company of the professors and dons. Once or twice I was allowed to dine with him at the High Table at Jesus. Raucous and unheeding undergraduates may thrust themselves into the dining-hall of a college without any sense of holy quiet. (And yet I suspect them of feeling more than they think it good manners to show!) But to a colonial, raised upon the sight of galvanised iron and weather boards, every dim portrait hanging against a background of venerable oak, every slow walking don and every flashing candlestick upon the table is as exciting as huge

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perfect pearls must be in the hands of a devoted collector. Every step one takes towards the high table makes one more nervous and proud of the occasion. If you think this high-falutin' nonsense, I would ask you to pause and try to understand what it means for New Zealanders to come home—for England is our home—and feel for the first time what the historians mean when they write of centuries. A century is a long, long time, and its meaning is dim to us in the colonies. After dinner at the high table, I suffered and enjoyed the ordeal of rising from my chair and walking at the heels of the Master, from the dining-hall to the Common Room. Here we sat and talked and I was warmed by the indulgence of the old scholars who were too kind to make me feel young and unimportant. When the ceremony of the port was over, I was taken to the quiet of Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch's rooms.

No book of recollections tells all the truth. Manners, fear, shyness and vanity prevent one from digging too deep. The nerve itself may be hinted at but it is seldom exposed. Now and again, one meets a man to whom one might reveal the nerve without fear. I felt that Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch was such a man. There is a test by which I know instinctively, whether I am right or wrong. The test may seem foolish but to me it is always final. I have a secret sin and this is my love for blowing bubbles. I have secreted penny clay pipes and soapy water in cupboards, in many countries. There they have waited for the time when I could be alone and

blow my first soap bubble, trembling as it grew, whirling with colour and light before it rose from the pipe, like a Sultan from his throne. I hope that I never grow old enough to be supercilious over the beauty of a soap bubble, rising from the white clay rim, to flirt with the wind and destroy itself upon the sharp twig of a tree or the ceiling of a room.

Within five minutes, I knew that Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch was a man to whom I might confess my love of blowing bubbles, without stirring a sneer upon his face. As I sat in his room, I could not show either my faith or my pleasure. How disastrous it is for us to meet the men whose books have been an influence upon us ! We sit like dumb fools and stare, looking so stupid that our worship can be nothing but a pain to them ! I listened to Sir Arthur's talk, which danced from early bronze coinage to yachting off Fowey, from Oliver Goldsmith to King Edward and then to ways by which a pheasant may be cooked. Upon this last matter, he chose the rich words of a poet. He moved about the room as he talked, from near the yellow tulips to a long, low bookcase and then back to the tulips again. The room belonged to him and not to the servants, as so many bachelor rooms seem to do. The first of Sir Arthur's books which I read was *Dead Man's Rock*. It was the first he ever wrote. Sitting in his room in Cambridge, my ears delighted with his talk and my eyes pleased by the sight of his books and pictures, I half expected to find the ' great iron key ' of his romance hanging from the ceiling. I even

looked up, but this was a room in Jesus, not the 'Front Parlour' of Lantrig from which Ezekiel Trenoweth went away in the good ship *Golden Wave*, to seek his inheritance. The key was not there and I wondered, as I listened, whether the undergraduates who clatter into the halls to hear Sir Arthur's lectures, ever turn back a little in their reading, to discover one of the most exciting books written in English.

About half-past ten o'clock, we rose to leave the cosy fire. Sir Arthur came to the door with us and, as we shook hands, Canon Nairne said to him, 'I don't see you to-morrow . . . you are going away, aren't you?'

'Yes, to Bury St. Edmunds, but . . . but not to praise them.'

After meeting Sir Arthur, his book *From a Cornish Window* became one of my bedside friends. When I was a boy in Auckland I used to escape from the disappointments and irritations about me by gazing into the pictures of our art gallery. I was able to forget Auckland and, moving from picture to picture, I could drink coffee in Venice, or enjoy my siesta in the cool orchard of an English farm. I could hide in a loft with one of Monmouth's men, on the day of Sedgemoor, or run with Thracians upon their wild horses through the flying surf. In the same way, certain books give one this illusion of escape. A harassing day can be brushed away by *Redgauntlet* or *Rodney Stone*. The company of my bedside books seldom changes and it is as mixed as good

company should be. *Pride and Prejudice*, *Zuleika Dobson*, *Sons and Lovers*, Calverley's verses, Shakespeare's Sonnets, *Mrs. Caudle's Curtain Lectures* and the anonymous *Letters from an old Parson to his Sons*. *From a Cornish Window* joined them contentedly and became one of my books of escape : a book to be read in the half hour before sleep, to bring tranquillity after the fuss of the day. A dismal outlook from a window, irritating people or loneliness in a foreign place can all be forgotten when I am allowed, by merely turning a page, to sit in Sir Arthur's room at Fowey.

My window, then, looks out from a small library upon a small harbour frequented by ships of all nations—British, Danish, Swedish, Norwegian, Russian, French, German, Italian, with now and then an American or a Greek—and upon a shore which I love because it is my native country. Of all views I reckon that of a harbour the most fascinating and the most easeful, for it combines perpetual change with perpetual repose. It amuses like a panorama and soothes like an opiate, and when you have realised this you will understand why so many thousands of men around this island appear to spend all their time in watching tidal water. . . .

One summer, I went to Fowey and the 'upper half' of me appeared above Sir Arthur's garden wall. I fought the temptation to call, for I too, have a house of my own and I know the delights of being left alone.

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Much of what I learned about writing in the years that followed, was due to Sir Arthur's teaching. I worked hard, with his book *On the Art of Writing* at my side, and tried to express my ideas in simple words. Not so very long ago I was obliged to write to him and ask him to allow me to use a passage from one of his books. I did not suppose, I told him, that he would remember me. His answer came : ' Why, of course I remember you : follow your writings, and like them and what you are aiming at.' The letter arrived early in the morning. I turned a somersault on the carpet with the sheet in my hand and, on that day, I worked more fiercely than ever before.

People in the Dominions are often confused when they try to judge the merits of the public school system in England. Unfortunately, the least illustrious scholars of Eton, Winchester and other schools are found in the new countries. They are often misfortunate fellows who, for having failed to wear the conventional cloak of the public schools with grace have been sent off in ignominy to the antipodes. The best men of the public schools are seldom inclined to break away from English life, to become colonists. The groove of their existence is already ordained for them when they are born and if they obey the orders of their social class and respect the traditions of their school, they fall into the groove and become worthy Britons. Their insularity may lead them to patronise the new countries

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but this is through indolence rather than observation and conviction.

As a boy in New Zealand I had thought of the public schools of England as part of an enchanting but antediluvian machine. I must confess that my patronage of the public school boy was as severe as his patronage of the colonial. I admired the ease with which he moved in rooms, his self-confidence and his manners; but I was not willing at first to concede him the foundation of character and the merit of usefulness. After twelve years in England, I am vain enough to say that I can give almost every public school boy his placard of Eton, Harrow or Winchester without knowing first at which school he was educated. Etonians, Harrovians and Wykehamists are as different to me as Prussians, Australians and Viennese.

During the years in which I lived at Windsor, I was able to observe the life at Eton and through my observation I came to appreciate the unwritten laws which govern a great public school. The proof of Eton's greatness lies in the refreshing fact that it can produce wastrels as well as gentlemen. The school is an acid test for the young, developing natural impulses with as much energy as it enforces tradition. The result is a tribute to the system, for we find the old Etonian becoming either a conscientious Briton, working, often brilliantly, for his country, or a ne'er-do-well, clinging to his old Etonian tie, like a drowning man to his last straw. The gulf between these two men seems to justify

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Eton. Its sheep become prize sheep and its goats are banished to the outer darkness. The school seems to develop character rather than to change it.

I met many Eton boys when I was living at Windsor. Shyness, which is a pleasing grace in the young, was usually the only barrier between myself and an interesting talk with them. I found that they were neither curbed nor twisted by their school. Whether photography, Michael Angelo's drawings, hunting, verse or beagling happened to be their interest, they threw themselves into it with zest. And this was delightful, for I have seldom known a young enthusiast who was a bore. Eton saved me from the groove into which I might have settled among the older people in the cloisters. It was good therefore to be able to leave the company of the old, with their memories and their talk playing about the end of the old century, and hurry down the Hundred Steps, towards Eton. Here were no memories : only enthusiasm and talk of to-morrow.

*When all the world is young, lad,
And all the trees are green ;
And every goose a swan, lad,
And every lass a Queen.*

I have written of the pleasure of being invited to sit with old people. It is not much greater than the compliment of being asked to drink tea with a boy at Eton. He has already learned to be a good host.

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He is able to carry off the situation, within his little room, with the manner of a lordly host in a great house. Your hat and coat are taken without fuss. The fire is ablaze and the chairs are drawn up before it. He has performed a miracle upon the small table in the centre of the room. A cake, gorgeous with walnuts and gay icing sugar, dominates the group of dishes. There are fat chocolate biscuits, even sultana bread and honey. And this is not all ! A Lower Boy appears with boiled eggs and toast. To hold back from the feast is not playing the game. Nor will your fears of fat and pains help to break the ice of conversation, so you throw yourself over the groaning board and try, with the vanity which besets us all in our late thirties, to show that you too are young : you too have a stomach which craves for food and a mind which is not above healthy greed. This climbing-down is not bogus. The little room, with its groups of cricketers upon the wall, its book-case with Euclid, Plato and P. G. Wodehouse sitting in friendship side by side, its squash ball in a corner and, beside the bed, an electric torch for reading after ' lights out,' makes you feel that you are not so old after all. You tell a story to prove that you are not a tiresome old prig and, in the end, your young host flatters you by forgetting that you are not in your teens.

As you walk home, flicking grass heads with your stick, leaping up the steps two at a time, you congratulate yourself that as you rose to go, your young host forgot to give you your hat and coat

and left you to scramble for them as if, indeed, you were his contemporary.

The merits of the public schools must grow out of the character of the men who direct them. I like to think that this is true, for one cannot live near to Eton without being conscious of the influence of men like Doctor Montague James, the Provost. Dr. James is perhaps the greatest of all living English scholars. Yet one has never heard an Eton boy complain that he has felt belittled or made afraid by his scholarship. Because I am outside the public school world but human enough to be a listener, I have often been allowed unusual confidence in talking to Etonians of their school. I have often seen them start with pleasure at the mention of the Provost's name. The disappointments of school life, the turmoil of trying to become scholars, the moral anxieties and the passion for games: no experience seems to divert them from their chief human enthusiasm. I cannot write much more without stepping over the edge of good manners, but I wonder how many hundreds upon hundreds of old Etonians there are who cherish, above all other recollections of their school, the occasion when they were allowed a quiet talk in the Provost's room? There was perhaps a thirteenth century manuscript spread upon the table, reminding them that he was a scholar. But it was rubbing shoulders with a thriller, to remind them that his playfulness saved his scholarship from ever becoming inhuman. If they went to him to be reproved or to be praised,

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they always found that the expression on his face, even in repose, was nearer to a smile than a frown.

One day, during my first month at Windsor, the Dean told me a story of the Provost's erudition. Some years before I went there, the builders were trying to remove some offensive eighteenth century stucco from the outer walls of the Deanery. They came upon a coat of arms, carved in stone and, beneath the design, an inscription in a tongue not recognised by any of the members of the Chapter. The Dean copied it upon a card and sent in to the Provost. His answer came by return of post. The words were from the Runic poet —. He gave the actual numbers of the lines. It was found later that they had been added to the memorial of one of the Dean's predecessors who had been Ambassador for Queen Anne at the Court of Charles XII of Sweden. The King of Sweden had asked him to adopt the lines as his motto and they had thus come to the wall of the Castle, when the Ambassador returned to England, to become Dean of Windsor.

Other stories of the Provost's awful erudition were told to me. Then I read *Eton and Kings* and came upon the frightening story of how he translated the Book of Baruch from the Ethiopian, while he was still a boy at school. I felt a little more confident when I read on, to find that he had written a letter to Queen Victoria (still as a school boy) asking her to accept the dedication of his work. My trepidation almost died when I turned back a few pages, to read again of the bananas and

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tea-sucks he had eaten while he was at school. But the fears came back when I was told that he had learned Danish, only to be able to translate Hans Andersen's fairy stories into English. (My pity for any man who does not know this book cannot be measured). I could not believe him to be an ogre when I read his ghost stories, but I was afraid again, when I was told that he was the greatest living authority on stained glass and that there were few gargoyles on any cathedral in France or England which he could not describe at command.

Some years ago, the editor of a London newspaper asked me to write an article on the new tapestries, illustrating incidents in the life of St. George, which had been added to the Lower Chapel at Eton. The Dean of Windsor suggested that I should go to see Dr. Montague James and ask him for the facts of the story.

I laughed. 'I wouldn't dare,' I said. But I dared, with the Dean's encouragement, and I sent Dr. James a note, asking him to see me. His reply came, as the replies of busy men usually travel, within twenty-four hours. He asked me to take tea with him. I forgot my fears within two minutes. Dr. James told me all I wished to know, not as a master talking to a fool, but as if Dr. James had waited all his life only to speak with me of the tapestries in the Lower Chapel at Eton. I walked out of the Provost's Lodge with the warm feeling that we had been scholars together, so kind had he been in giving me my medicine. He seemed to administer

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senna tea with the gesture of bestowing laurels. When I was a little older, I realised that some men achieve the kindly state of liking the young for what they might become, rather than of despising them for their gaucherie and ignorance.

The old man with whom I used to walk in Windsor Park was Canon Dalton. I like to recall my first meeting with him, since it opened the richest and most important chapter of my life. He asked me to stay with him at Windsor in the spring of 1924. I had celebrated the crisp April morning by buying new gloves and some orchids for my London room, with their golden noses dipped in brown as if they had been eating chocolate. From the beginning the day was one of celebration. I had walked down St. James's to buy a new hazel-wood stick from Mr. Brigg. This alone crowned the day with something of ceremony: going into the shop, saying 'Good-morning' to the urbane keeper of the sticks (for one could not call him a salesman), the clusters of dark umbrellas, the creamy umbrellas with green linings for tropical countries and the elegant malacca sticks with golden tops. A humble hush came upon me as I said, 'I only want a hazel-wood stick, please, for tramping in the country.'

Then the sight of St. James's Palace at the end of the Street; a screen of dark, old beauty for the pandemonium of cars to move against! And the little speck of flame, where the scarlet-coated guardsman stood, burning against the sombre wall! The bark of the hazel-wood stick was pleasantly rough

against my hand. I remember watching it with pleasure as it lay, supine in the rack of the train which carried me from the dust of Paddington station into the light of the Thames Valley. It *was* a stick, a stick to swing in wide circles, and whip nettle leaves and thistles from their stalks ; a stick for a dog to gnaw ; a stick to know and make into a friend.

It was a stick to lean upon as I walked up the hill to the Castle. I passed the bronze figure of Queen Victoria, her sceptre raised, dividing the traffic to right and left with all the rigidity of a London policeman. I walked in under the arch of the Henry the Eighth Gate, up the slope past St. George's and then into the shadows of the cloisters. I was to drink tea with Canon Dalton, a bent old man, in his eighties ; secure from the uncertainties of the world, a dear, unreasonable tyrant whom I was to know better, to walk with and to talk with many times in the years that followed. I remember that the cloisters were gay with flowers. The Chapter Clerk bent over them, a trowel in his hand, as I walked towards the door. There was no alarming electric bell to press. A rusted chain hung upon the right hand side. The brass plate on the door was so worn with the rubbing of forty years that the name of my host could barely be read upon it. I pulled the chain and a bell shattered the silence within.

I found the Canon in a study at the top of the house. I walked up to the first floor by way of a broad staircase. Then I climbed still higher, upon

steps as steep and narrow as a ship's ladder. From the window of the study I could see the pinnacles of Eton Chapel and the Thames, green, winding and tranquil, flowing towards Datchet. But I turned from the window. Beyond the piles of newspapers, the tables heaped with books, the bronze figures of Victorian Princes and the untidy desk, there sat an old, old man. When one is a writer, desperate over the inadequacy of words, one often falls into the habit of choosing the painters who might make portraits of one's friends. I chose Raeburn for the Master of Lovat. May I say that Canon Dalton was waiting for Rembrandt to paint him, for only Rembrandt could have revealed the fire behind the lined, pale face ! Only Rembrandt could have told you what you could not see at first : that the crinkled hands were mighty with energy and the bent back capable of straightening to fine indignation and pride : that the tempests of an old man's resolution lay within the withered frame and that there was kindness for all poor and suffering creatures but, in the face of frustration, a ruthlessness which smacked of the middle ages. Over all these variances there was a charity, a goodness and humour which will make him one of the most disturbing but one of the best beloved of God's angels. His qualities were not apparent as Canon Dalton rose from the depths of his chair ; as his bony hand extended towards me, in unison with the kindly smile and the humorous eyes.

' Welcome to Windsor, my boy. I went to your country in the *Ophir* with the present King and Queen,

and they were very kind to me there. So now I must welcome you in return. Sit down and have some tea.'

It was in this way that I first went to Windsor. In the afternoon, we walked in the park. Canon Dalton had lived in the Castle for many, many years and he knew every walk, every memorial and every tree. We wandered where Elizabeth had walked and we picked lilies of the valley in the Chapter garden where Chaucer may have strayed. He traced the story of the *Merry Wives of Windsor* for me, showing me the hollow in which Falstaff slept and the way by which the would-be gallant was carried away to the swamp at Datchet in the laundry basket. As we strolled back from the lake at Frogmore, in the cool of the evening, we came upon a bronze dog, standing upon his hind legs. He was a dachshund, and his name, on a plate beneath him, was 'Dacho.' Canon Dalton paused. 'You see,' he said, 'I am a *very* old man and you are a very young one. I used to feed that dog with buns, and now' (he moved forward and touched a place where the bronze tail was decayed and broken), 'and now, he is dead and even his memorial is rotting away.' He seemed so old then that he was barely alive.

We went back to the cloisters and to Canon Dalton's house. We climbed the stairs to his high study again. Upon the staircase were two pictures; one of a stalwart sailor, glowing with health, and the other of Chatterton, dying in his garret. 'There is an object lesson for you,' the Canon said, as we climbed past the two pictures. 'I have had those

two prints by me for many years. If you are going to be a writer, remember them.'

That night I slept in Windsor Castle for the first time. The great oak gates closed and I was one with the story of old stone and ancient wood. The story of Norman, Plantagenet and Tudor: the mighty procession from William the Conqueror to Queen Victoria. My bedroom was high in the Castle wall and I went to bed so early that the rooks were still fussing and cawing in the chestnuts. I remember leaning out of my bedroom window and looking upon the scene which had been lively with sunshine during the day. Now the high window was above an unfathomable pit of darkness and the pinnacles of Eton Chapel were dim, against a deep sapphire sky. For the first time I felt the full excitement of the Englishman's history: his wars and his kings. It had not been easy in the dominion where I was born, with less than a century in our story of colonisation. Here in Windsor, the glory, the multitude of people, the battles and the sensations of power came near to me. I touched them when I touched the old stone window-sill with my hands. Within the room a candle burned: the finger of flame beckoned me to sleep.

Some years passed before I made my home at Windsor. I travelled to Africa and to Germany and wherever I went, Canon Dalton's letters gave me glimpses of his home in the Castle and of the park beside the Thames. He told me of the restoration of St. George's Chapel. . . . 'in our humble

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way we are plodding away,' he wrote, which was amusing, for humility was not his habit.

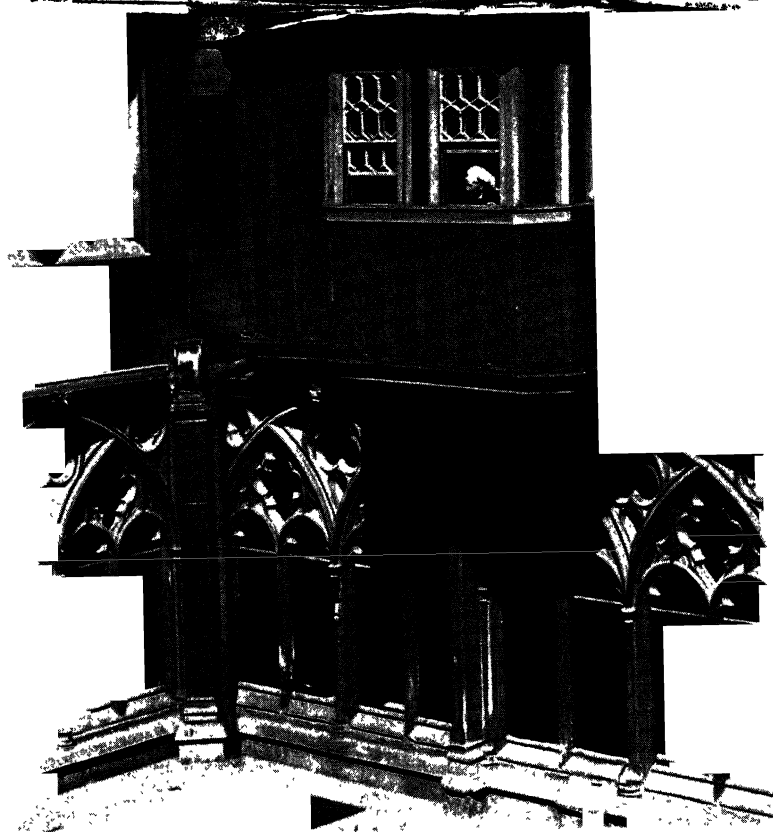
In every letter there was a little fire of indignation. The coming election and the wicked politicians : the American tourists or the line of motor omnibuses at the foot of the Castle were especially sharp thorns in his side. In 1926, when I returned to England and made my home in the Cloisters, I came to know the fierce old veteran better. The nearer view was full of surprises. Canon Dalton had been tutor to King George and to the Duke of Clarence, but he had eluded the traditional suavity of the courtier. We may turn to Queen Victoria's letters and awaken a picture of John Neale Dalton, the young curate of Whippingham, facing the Queen at Osborne House. (He had already been with the princes for some years and he remembered taking them to St. Paul's, in February of 1872, for the service of thanksgiving after their father's recovery from typhoid fever).

It was in February of 1877 that the Queen wrote of him. She said that she was satisfied to observe 'what a fearless, honest man' he was who had been chosen as tutor for her grandsons. Fifty years had not dimmed the fearlessness, when I met him. The honesty had perhaps been undermined by the waywardness of an undisciplined mind. I once heard him declare, 'Thank heaven there are two things I have never had ; nerves or a conscience.' If these two were lacking, the gap was filled by a heart which was more kindly than he would admit. We used to walk together in the summer evenings,

down past Queen Adelaide's cottage or beneath the cedars at Frogmore. Canon Dalton stumbled as he walked, as if his head, thrown forward, must at any moment cause him to over-balance. His hands were clasped behind his back and his eyes fixed upon the earth. His voice, which was famous for its range of two octaves, would grumble like the deepest note of a bass-violin. Then it would leap skywards into a shrill soprano. The low notes were for his cynical pooh-poohing of all mankind. His high notes were for tirades of indignation.

In some ways, life at Windsor was like life at Barchester Towers. The 'gentlemanlike clerical doctors' were there, walking in meditation, through the cloisters or lost in some burrow of their rambling houses, with their books. If the Minor Canons were not as 'happy, well-used and well-fed' as Trollope describes the Minor Canons at Barchester, it was because Canon Dalton looked upon them as a sergeant-major looks upon corporals. He treated them accordingly.

Even those of us who were young walked about the castle with a mute upon our tongues for we were intimidated by the history of a thousand years. One's own energy and individuality seemed to be weak and futile, locked within the walls of the Castle where every King had lived since the Norman Conquest. The weight of the past smothered me. I never seemed to live there, separately and clearly, as an entity. One was conscious of this oppression on the warm summer evenings, when the lofty Round



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Tower was pale as ivory in the moonlight. The great gates were closed on the world outside. The thousand years filled the castle with spectres : they pressed in on one almost, so that one was conscious of their shape and breath and movement. There had been so much life in the ten centuries that one's own existence was a mere joke. One drew back, barely daring to breathe as the procession of ghosts walked past. The Confessor, who 'lisp'd his prayers and cured the halt and blind' : the Norman Conqueror, hunting in the great park where the Saxon Kings had hunted before him, and John returning from Runnymede, gnashing his teeth, rolling his eyes and gnawing sticks and straws as he 'gave vent to rage and curses against the Charter.' Chaucer, the 'father of English poetry,' walked in the Chapter garden when he was Clerk of the Works at St. George's and Shakespeare went to Windsor to write *The Merry Wives* for the Queen. His initials are scratched upon a wall in the Chapel. It was from a window in his prison at Windsor that King James of Scotland first looked down and saw Joan Beaufort walking in the garden below.

*And therewith cast I down mine eye again,
Where I saw walking under the tower,
Full secretly, new comyn her to plain,
The fairest and the freshest young flower
That e'er I saw, methought, before that hour ;
For which sudden abate, anon did start
The blood of all my body to my heart.*

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Pepys had listened to the music in St. George's and Walpole had written some of his letters to Horace Mann from his house in the cloisters. The procession was always too magnificent for me to dare to raise my voice or write anything of my own. This oppression of years was once lightened by an incident on my birthday. I was already made dismal by the increase of my years and because nobody had remembered to wish me well at breakfast. I changed to go to London and as I walked towards the door which admits one into the cloisters, I moved and felt like a centenarian. I opened the door and found a guide and twenty tourists staring at me. The guide was pointing ostensibly to the doorway and actually at me. 'This, ladies and gentlemen,' he said, 'is the oldest bit in the Castle—Edward the Third.'

There was life in the castle, with all its weight of history: the Canons and their wives, the choristers ambling noisily through the cloisters on their way to Evensong, boy servants playing a ball game on the flagstones after sunset, and a few old ladies, their own lives ended and free to devote all their attention to their neighbours. The kindly gossip of a small community added its spice to our lives. Canon Dalton was something of a juggernaut, moving ruthlessly among his frail neighbours. For him, the end justified the means. Truth was wax in his hands and sometimes he could abandon the more gentle manner of priestliness, to stamp and roar as a merciless pagan, angry with the rest of the world.

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When the present Dean of Windsor was installed in 1917, Canon Dalton arranged the elaborate and beautiful service. There is no more noble setting for a ceremony than St. George's Chapel and Canon Dalton guarded its traditions zealously, but in his own odd way. At a point in the service, the two other Canons were to advance in the procession and bow three times towards the King's stall in the Choir and three times towards the altar. Canon Dalton was so impatient that he took two of them by the scruff of the neck and forced them to bow. The rest of the service proceeded in peace until the reading of the special prayer by one of the Canons. The service had not been held since Queen Victoria's time and the printed order included her name. Instead of substituting *King George*, the Canon followed the print rather than his reason and read *Queen Victoria*. Suddenly, Canon Dalton stirred in his stall and muttered, 'Silly old fool,' loud enough to be heard all over the choir.

Among his colleagues he was a firebrand. But he was tender with humble or suffering people. He would abandon his breakfast, in his ninetieth year (after a cold bath, even in winter), to visit some sick creature. He once knelt down on his old knees, to make the fires and clean the grates of a man and his wife who were too sick to fend for themselves. A recalcitrant servant, a working-man tempted to petty crime, a fool or a knavish boy were all certain of his help and his sympathy, but let an equal thwart him or ask for his pity and he would rise to

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destroy. Yet some quality in him, a quality which made his sins seem like mere naughtiness, endeared him to one so that only the memory of his chuckle and the history of his kindness remained after he died.

Sometimes he would waylay me in the Cloisters. His noisy stumbling over the flagstones announced him long before he appeared around a corner. The old bent figure would pause. The old bent hand would be raised and Canon Dalton would dig me in the ribs so that I would be almost winded. 'Come to tea this afternoon. Not much of a tea. But I can put a spoonful of coal on the fire to keep us warm.'

When my books were published; when the awkward colonial youngster to whom he had been so kind was making his own life, Canon Dalton scoffed at everything I did. 'I see you have written another bad novel. Never read novels myself, except the Bible, and I suppose that is looked upon as a work of fiction nowadays. I don't read your novels,' he would say.

The scorn in his voice might have withered me if it were not for a friend who told me on the sly that Canon Dalton read everything I wrote and spoke of me with pleasure. In later years, the afternoons in his attic would have been disturbing if I had not learned to love him. It was almost as if he had made up his mind that his dying breath should be a protest against mankind. 'Fools, all fools,' he would say, crushing the pages of *The*

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Times into a bundle and throwing them on the floor. 'All sham and humbug,' he would say when somebody admired the Round Tower. The top had been added by George the Fourth and it was dismissed as 'A modern contraption, a lie, a damned lie.' Canon Dalton had not closed his ears when he went to sea with the young Princes and his almost biblical English was spiced with the adjectives of the wardroom. It might have seemed incongruous to those who did not know him, to hear him stamping along the cloisters after Evensong, the phrases of the Benediction still upon his tongue; to hear him storm against 'those Minor Canons, all fools, all fools.' The old saw fitted him. His bark was worse than his bite. One channel of his naughtiness, still strong in his eighties, was a wish to dine his guests well and completely. Canon Dalton was Chaplain to the Drapers' Company and although he was rigid in his notion that all school-masters and officials should retire when they were sixty ('worn-out old fossils: ought to be dead'), he never applied the unkindly law to his own office. Now and again he would take his friends to a Drapers' dinner. His most beloved memory was of a certain contractor who once accompanied him to dine. At the end, the contractor fell back in his car and muttered to his chauffeur, 'You know where I live.'

In June of 1926 I went up to London with Canon Dalton, to dine with him at the Drapers' Company. As we passed out of the castle gates, he summoned the policeman. 'Have a wheelbarrow here when

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we come back. Mr. Bolitho will need it. He is dining with me. We can wheel him home.' The policeman tried not to smile as he said, 'Yes, sir.'

The dinner was of course rich and excellent. Such turtle soup, such asparagus, such duckling and such strawberries! The first wonder was to see this old man of eighty-seven eating ice-cream. No mere nibbling satisfied his appetite. The wine was worthy of the occasion: Madeira, Rudesheimer Hinterhaus, 1900; Pol Roger, 1915; and 1820 brandy which, as the Canon roared at me, was 'smooth as mother's milk.' As he bent over his plate, he kept one eye on my glass. When it was barely half empty, the waiter was summoned. The gentle calm of sane intoxication came to me. 'Good wine never does you any harm. Drink up, my boy. Fine old institutions, these City Companies. Umph!'

'You saw that nude statue as we came in?'

'Yes,' I said.

'Well, that's why we need Drapers. Come on, drink up. You'll never taste better hock than this.'

At the end, a silver-gilt salver full of rose-water was handed round the table. The old gentlemen were not in the least self-conscious as they dipped their napkins in the sweet water and then brushed their beards and their moustaches.

Returning to Windsor from London was something of a comedy. We stood on the pavement outside the Drapers' Hall. Canon Dalton clung to an astonishing old kit bag at the bottom of which he carried his day clothes. When he placed the bag

on the pavement, the big, empty top subsided as if it were in wine. He smacked me with his open hand when I attempted to carry the bag for him. Nor would he permit a taxi-cab. We descended into an underground station. The stops between Moorgate and Paddington seemed endless. 'Which station is this?' he asked, as we were nearing the end. 'I do not know,' I answered. 'I cannot see.'

Canon Dalton peered out himself and grunted. 'Bovril, all the stations seem to be Bovril.'

We came to Windsor about midnight. The Canon battered on the oak gates of the Castle with his stick and they were opened by the policeman. The wheelbarrow was not there. We walked up towards the cloisters, past St. George's Chapel, with its heraldic pinnacles standing against the sky. I went to Canon Dalton's door with him and waited while he fumbled for his key. He opened the door and grunted, 'Good-night. Never refuse a glass of good wine. It's sacrilege, sir, sacrilege.' Then he banged the door and left me to walk into the adjoining cloister where I lived.

When Canon Dalton died in his ninety-third year, Windsor seemed to lose its most lively link with the old century. It was a desolate experience, for a long time, to walk in the park with no hope of finding him stumbling home. And, in the quiet hour of Evensong, the Chapel seemed bereft of a presence which had been part of it, as much as its music and its candle-light. One no longer heard the tinkle of his spectacles as he placed them in the brass candle

sconce before his stall : nor saw the lined pallid face bend down behind the carved oak desk, the yellow candle-light making a shining cap upon his bald head. Others have come and gone since he was there, but his name and his stories are still recalled, with humour and delight. One knows that a time will come when, with the death of another generation, he will no longer be a memory. Then, I think, he will become a legend.

The life of Windsor was not all within the castle walls. There was a theatre to which we sometimes descended, carrying a lantern to light us down the Hundred Steps which led from the cloisters, through the castle walls and into the town. There were plays from London and every Christmas, we had a pantomime. There was the young life of Eton : boys upon the river or darting about the playing fields at their evening games. In the summer there was a strawberry mess at Rowland's to give me a pain and remind me that it is wrong and foolish to allow oneself to become old. Once every year, a fair came to the meadow by the river bank. Then, the Thames upon which William and Mary had glided in their barge : the Thames, over which Anne had been looking when they brought her the news of Blenheim, became rowdy and gay. Swing-boats and merry-go-rounds worked themselves into a frenzy to the tune of a squeaky gavotte. Guardsmen in their scarlet coats walked with their sweethearts among the buttercups and daisies, and cheeky urchins lounged about the tent pegs of the fair, peeking and

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hollering at 'The Fattest Woman in the World,' sweltering in her tent, or 'The Tattooed Lady' with the surprising *Charge of Balaclava* on her back. The people of the town were not intimidated by the grim bulk of the castle nor by its history. They played their gramophones beneath the willows which had sheltered Queen Victoria when she walked in the summer evenings, and they pub-crawled the old streets of Windsor with as much gusto as Falstaff himself, out upon a carousal.

In the country beyond the town, the gimcrack villas and motor 'buses have spoiled the most secluded places and the lowing herds and ploughmen of Gray's day have been chased far afield. In the summers of 1925 and 1926, when I first went to live there, a few secluded houses still survived the intrusion and they hid away, safe from the prying eyes of the jerry-builders and the trippers. None of these retreats was more enchanting than The Long White Cloud, the home of the late Frank Schuster, set by the river at Bray. Frank Schuster was celebrated for his kindness and for his appreciation of talent. His gentle voice was warm with friendliness and he had the rare quality of being a perfect audience. Singers and writers like such men more than any in the world. I did not meet him until a year or two before he died and I was no more than a young intruder into the company of his friends. His house was another in which I learned to understand the kindness of older and famous people who might easily have passed the raw beginner

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by, without encouragement or even notice of his existence. The name upon Frank Schuster's gate made me feel welcome the first time I went to his house. It was the English form of the Maori name for New Zealand. When the first Tahitians found the north island of New Zealand in the thirteenth century, they saw it as a 'long white cloud' upon the horizon and they named it Aotearoa.

In June of 1927 Frank Schuster celebrated Sir Edward Elgar's birthday with an afternoon party at Bray. The musicians who came to play Elgar's compositions were a distinguished company: Albert Sammons was the first violin, W. H. Reed was the second violin, Raymond Jeremy played the viola, Felix Salmond the 'cello and William Murdoch the piano. We sat in an open garden-room and listened to the String Quartet, the Pianoforte Quintet, and Albert Sammons and William Murdoch playing the Sonata for violin and pianoforte.

I was still young and impressionable and I confess that my attention was divided between the music and the celebrated company. I sat between Mrs. Patrick Campbell and Madame Kirkby Lunn, which was a great experience for a young man born in New Zealand. I was dragged between emotion and alarm. In the dismal training camp in New Zealand, I used to play a record of Madame Kirkby Lunn singing *Three Fishers*, when I was desolate. Sometimes when the rain and the wind and the cold penetrated to one's bones, the tunes of the dilapidated gramophone offered a happy escape. I had

to thank Madame Kirkby Lunn for moments of pleasure at a time when I needed them desperately and I tried to do this in a soft whisper, during an interval between the items of music. Then a tall, horse-like woman crossed the room and introduced me to Mrs. Patrick Campbell. I had scarcely shaken her hand when she boomed at me, 'Now don't tell me that your grandfather had a photograph of me on his dressing-table, because almost everybody I ever meet tells me that and it is very depressing.' I reassured her. The only photographs my grandfather had in the house were of Mr. Gladstone and Queen Victoria. 'Then I am very pleased, because I am tired of being told about people's grandfathers. They only want flappers nowadays. That is why I wasn't a success in America. They seemed to think that I should be sitting in a cottage on the beach, reading my scrap-book.' The Quintet began: Mrs. Patrick Campbell leaned forward and dived into the music. There was an herbaceous border of famous people sitting behind me: Arnold Bennett, looking morose in a black hat which he forgot to remove, Sir Landon and Lady Ronald, Gustav Holst, and on one side, near to our host, Sir Edward Elgar himself.

I had dined with Frank Schuster the evening before. There had been many people and I had not been able to say more than 'Good evening' to Sir Edward, who was besieged when dinner was over. He was wonderfully kind to me on the second evening and I am drawn back,

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with the recollection of meeting him, to my theme of older people. There was no reason why he should have bothered about me. I was then a rather awkward young man, and although I had written two obscure novels, nobody had really heard of me. Frank Schuster had told Sir Edward that I was a New Zealander, just come to live in England. When the music was over and the congratulations ended, Sir Edward walked over to me and said, 'The trouble last night was that you came too late and went too early. Are you staying to dinner to-night?'

'I am afraid not,' I answered.

A few minutes afterwards, as the great company was departing, Frank Schuster drew me aside and invited me to dine. Am I too insistent in dwelling upon the pleasure it was to me to join in such talk as there was on such occasions? Talk of which I barely dreamed as a boy; talk moving on, from music to burgundy, from burgundy to poetry, and back to music again, with no sharply clever interludes to disturb the even tenor of our thought: with no monologue by any one in love with his own voice: unselfconscious talk, in which the older people listened to the young as unselfishly as the young in turn listened to the old in awe. We were talking of the Second Movement of the Violin and Piano Sonata and Sir Edward told us how he came to write it. One day he was out fishing from the bank of a river, when he saw millions of dragon flies rise out of the water, making the air alive with colour

and sound. The place where he sat was lonely and he made quick notes which afterwards grew into the second movement of the sonata. Pride over the day might have shaken Sir Edward's humility, but he came down from the pedestal upon which we had placed him and he talked as a lad at the beginning of his life, more than as a master, living in the glow of fame and recognition. He talked of his beginning : of his first playing in an orchestra and then of his childhood love for the river bank, upon which his mother would find him, 'trying,' he told her, 'to understand the sounds of nature.'

When dinner was over, we went into a beautiful room ornamented by a fine collection of Leeds china. Here we sat and talked. Sir Edward asked me, 'Do you play any instrument yourself?' Before I realised upon what troublous water I was embarking, I said, 'I play the piano with my nose.' This absurd declaration may call for a little explanation. As a boy, I was forced to learn to play the piano and my brother was driven to the violin. We were too young to like the hours of imprisonment and we made a pact. I was not to 'tell on' my brother for lying flat on the sofa while he practised his violin if he did not report me for playing some of my treble notes with my nose. My fingers never learned to master the keys, but the talent for playing with my nose grew until I was something of a master. In the end, when freedom came, when I could turn away from the long, tedious hours of lessons, I was something of an executant, playing florid variations

of *Lead Kindly Light* and *Home, Sweet Home*, with a nose which has always been noted for its strength rather than its beauty.

There was no piano in the room in which I was sitting with Sir Edward Elgar, and I did not realise how dangerous it was for me to confess my talent. Sir Edward would not be denied. I was taken to a piano and forced to perform. With a touch which my hands could never have mastered, I played the treble notes of *Home, Sweet Home* with my nose, accompanying them with an uncertain bass, played with my fingers. The last, sensitive phrases ended with a flourish in which I covered three octaves, my nose sore and aching, but triumphant, never having played a wrong note.

From this time, Sir Edward Elgar was always kind to me. His plan to come and stay was spoiled by his death, but now and then there was a little note to remind me that my talent had not passed unnoticed and that he looked upon me as a fellow artist in the world of music.

There was an amusing aftermath to Frank Schuster's party. He had been kind enough to read my latest novel and he wished me to tell him of my plan for still another. I told him that I wished to write a story in which one of the chief characters was a prima donna. 'But,' I complained, 'it is not easy for I do not wish to make her a ranting and temperamental figure. I must go carefully.'

'There is only one way,' said Frank Schuster. 'You must meet some prima donnas.'

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Within two days, he had arranged for me to drink tea with Madame Emma Eames. I went to her London hotel and I was enslaved immediately. But she was a rock of goodness and not in the least like the figure in my story. I admitted to Frank Schuster, 'She is too noble and virtuous for my heroine. I want a more worldly woman.' He could produce prima donnas as easily as a conjuror flicking white rabbits out of a hat. He arranged for me to meet Dame Nellie Melba. I had met her twice before, but these occasions had been in the southern world in which she was born and to which she returned with the panoply of an empress. I had interviewed her one day, when I was a callow reporter on the staff of an Auckland newspaper. She had called me a 'blasted fool' and she had scorned me until somebody in the room told her that within a few weeks I was going into a training camp to be made into a soldier. Then she softened, told me that she would give me an autographed photograph to sustain me in the misery of the trenches and asked me to write to her. She was the most celebrated woman Australia had produced and we regarded her with awe when she came home to the Antipodes, to sing for us. We were always speechless before her majesty. I remember only one occasion when the spell was broken. She was asked to sing for a charity at a smart afternoon party. The cream of Auckland society had gathered to hear her. Her voice was as lovely as ever and when, at the end, she sang *Home, Sweet Home*, we were almost bowed before

the clear, boy-like notes. There was an old German lady in the audience, who did not understand why we paused, in awe, before we applauded. She beat her hands together, nudged her neighbour and cried to us, 'Encourage her, encourage her.'

Dame Nellie Melba was still more imperious when I went to see her in London. I knew that the frank and temperamental prima donna was hiding inside, but during my hour with her, she talked of none but the crowned heads of Europe. I was obliged to complain again to Frank Schuster, 'She is too grand for my character. I am sorry, but have you no prima donnas who are neither grand nor aggressively virtuous?' Another friend was called in to help me. He invited me to meet Madame Ljungberg. I sat next to her for luncheon on a dismal winter Sunday. Next day she was to sing in *Parsifal* at Covent Garden and I thought that on the eve of singing, she might give me the glimpse I needed: that she might be like a soldier, smelling the gunpowder in his nostrils on the eve of battle. Madame Ljungberg was charming. She sang Swedish songs and she talked. (My friend had greeted her with a chivalrous gesture. 'And now,' he had said, 'I have met all three Swedish nightingales: Jenny Lind, Neilsen and you.') Madame Ljungberg was too frank and simple to play upon our devotion. She talked of her home, of her motor car, of her travelling speed and of cooking. She was too practical and sane to help me. I went once more to Frank Schuster and said, 'There are no wicked prima

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donnas in the world, it seems.' I changed the plan for my story in the end and made my prima donna into a saint who loved children, cooked well, and kept all the ten commandments.

Chapter Seven

My first conception of Heaven came to me in a galvanised-iron church near to our farm in New Zealand. My wicked uncle always shocked us by calling the church 'tinned Christianity.' It was here, with a portable organ wheezing in one corner and the sunlight filtering in through the cracks between the sheets of galvanised-iron, that I first imagined what Heaven was to be like. It was to be of uncomfortable and dangerous marble seats and there were to be many angels, with Pre-Raphaelite faces, playing their harps all day long. Like most children, I confused my heaven with the transformation scene in my first pantomime.

I was brought up along a path of "Don'ts" as far as religion was concerned. Sunday was a hushed and frightening day and when tiny, I was taught to recite verses like,

*Matthew, Mark, Luke and John,
Bless the bed that I lie on. . . .*

A farm boy taught me a much more amusing form of the verse and I ran home in glee one day, to repeat breathlessly,

*Matthew, Mark, Luke and John
Went to bed with their trousers on
Matthew and Mark got up in the night
Because their trousers were too tight.*

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This seemed to be a more human picture of the saints, but my aunt and my uncle gasped at my wickedness. From that time my reading and my friends were censored. I had to treasure my parodies of the verses I had been told and hide them, like cigarettes or French novelettes. I liked most of all the indecent view of Mary and her lamb.

*Mary had a little lamb
With which she used to tussle,
She tore the wool from off its back
And made a nice new bustle.*

To me, this wicked poem was the apex of worldliness. I was trained to think of God as a terrible and angry old gentleman hiding around the corner and only waiting to pop out and cast me into a brimstone blaze. Every human trait was drained out of Him by my teachers and as I sat in the little galvanised church, yearning for the summer scene outside—the sweet grass, the hollows and the dark pines—I came to the conclusion that God was an interfering, tiresome and wholly superfluous old bore. It is sad that His kindness and humour are withheld from children. They would obey Him much more readily if they were not told about His clenched fist : if they were allowed to see the smile upon His face.

One day, a grand person came to our galvanised-iron church. He was dressed in magnificent clothes. My aunt, who smelled of lavender, leaned over me and whispered, ‘That is the Bishop.’ He had no

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smile upon his face and he was taller and wider than any other man I had seen. 'The Bishop must be God,' I said to myself. I announced my experience when I returned home. 'I saw God in Church this morning. He was fat and he looked very angry.'

My confusion was explained away. 'No, my dear. That was not God. That was the Bishop.' Kindly relatives have kept my answer as a family story. 'Then, if he is not God, he must be God's policeman.' From this time, all Bishops were God's policemen to me, and even when I was older the fear of them never left me.

In the summer of 1918, I was languishing in a Samoan garden, near to Vailima. I was still young enough to fall under the spell of Stevenson's island paradise and I lay back, looking over a lake of gleaming water-hyacinths, iridescent with a million dragon-flies. In my hand lay a copy of Stevenson's *Prayers*. The day before I had met an enchanting old priest among his flowers. Indeed, I had intruded upon him as he was bending over a border with a trowel in his hand. He must have been eighty years old. He stood up and said, 'Would you like to see my garden?'

I went in and he took me among his twisted, multi-coloured shrubs and his disobedient tropical vines, heavy with flowers, climbing anywhere and everywhere over the trees. He picked some of the sulphur yellow trumpets with his crinkled hands. Then we came into his house and in a cool, silent

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room we sat upon opposite sides of a table. There was a bottle of wine and when two glasses had mellowed me and eased my tongue, I became a little too self-revealing. He leaned towards me at a point in the conversation and said, ' You must not worry too much about God. When I came here sixty years ago, I was as confused as you are, my boy. And in all those sixty years, I have learned only one truth : that I must give myself to my neighbour. Until I learned this I had no peace within myself. When that stillness did come within me, I realised God.'

This wider, more kindly view of God was warming in my mind as I sat beside the water-hyacinths. I found that I could think of the God of whom the priest had spoken, lying back in indolence, with no attitude of prayer. It is odd how childhood fears are so deep-rooted. A party of tourists came down to the lake shore as I dreamed and among them was a Bishop, dressed in the gloom of his office. I leapt to my feet without thinking. I reacted to the old God, the fierce God. The Bishop was God's policeman and I was still afraid.

Ten years afterwards, when I had travelled the world, I came to rest in a quiet place, in the shadows of one of England's most beautiful churches. The phrase ' came to rest ' suggests the delicacy of an ' In Memoriam ' notice for myself. But there *was* rest upon this old, old earth of Windsor. Sometimes I was afraid of the safety and the calm which governed one's life within the old walls. The feeling of

belonging to any century but one's own was intensified at those times when the world outside was torn by some modern passion. During the strike of 1926, the news of anger filtered into the cloisters as from another world. Once, the anger came near to Windsor Castle gates. A fierce agitator roused the people until they sang, half audibly, the first verse of the *Red Flag* on the steps of Queen Victoria's statue. Then the gates through which the Tudors had ridden seemed offended. But a local publican soon mounted the steps and with his shoulder on a level with the bronze of the great Queen's skirt, he stirred the people to sing *God Save the King* so lustily that the dribbling notes of the *Red Flag* were forgotten. The full anxiety of public affairs never touched us. The confidence which one drew from the past was so strong (and dangerous in its strength) that one learned to smile indulgently upon the vagaries of contemporary thought. This false, comfortable state was evil for anybody who was young. One's wings lost the power of flight. The majesty of the past was more apparent than the uncertainty of the future.

One day I walked into the drawing-room to find no less than five Bishops sitting in the comfortable chairs. My terror cannot be described. Five of God's policemen in one room, and myself alone with them! My feet swelled to the size and weight of cabin trunks. They would not move. But God's policemen were not perturbed. They were listening to a good story about a certain fat prelate

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of the church whose surplice came back from the laundry, listed in the bill as 'one bell tent.' They took their pipes out of their mouths and roared; lusty guffaws of laughter. My feet shrank again and I was able to speak and to move.

It is not sacrilege to suppose that God himself has a sense of humour, since he included it among his blessings to mankind. Without humour a man must be a miserable wretch. It was when we saw Mussolini smile that we believed in him. It is because we never see Herr Hitler smile that we are still suspicious. There are few men who have been our leaders and the guardians of our traditions who have not been capable of laughter. I have not known many men with true religion in the core of them, who were without a chuckle. I was pleased therefore to find God's policemen laughing, when I walked into the room. Their laughter was prophetic. In the years that followed, I met almost every prelate of the Anglican Church and few of them were gloomy men.

A man who laughs at his own jokes can usually pass for a merry fellow, no matter how thin his jokes may be. His own laugh spurs his listeners on to emulate him. But a man who is a true wit, casting his pearl with exquisite care, with no show-off or noise, is not entirely appreciated. Dean Inge is such a man. His calm and repose have even earned him the adjective 'gloomy,' which is nonsense.

The Dean is said to dislike music. It only means

that he is more honest than most people, for the number of pretenders who attend upon musicians because they are smart, and go to the opera because it is fashionable, is legion. I came to my thirtieth year before I had the courage to announce that grand opera bored me and that even the single appeal of music itself could not reconcile me to the ghastly sight of a Wagnerian production. For years I lied. I crept into opera houses in Hanover, Frankfort, Vienna and Paris, deceiving my friends, applauding, hoping that my lack would not be known. If it is true that Dean Inge dislikes music, I have to be thankful for the gap in his taste because of one winter afternoon, when a number of guests had gathered at the Deanery for tea. They were to go afterwards into St. Paul's, to hear some organ music. I had lied wickedly. I had told Mrs. Inge that I had an appointment elsewhere. I felt that the scratch on my conscience was nothing to the agony I should suffer in a cold Cathedral, listening to an hour and a half of organ music. I could have died of shame as Mrs. Inge believed my story. Then my shame turned to joy. Dean Inge was also shunning the music: more honestly than myself. I found myself alone with him before the fire. Up to then, I had the usual newspaper-reader's notion of him; cold wisdom, cynicism, and gloom. I found instead a gentle, sympathetic man, gracious because he had read something of mine which had pleased him. He drew me into the net of his kindness so that I wondered if all the world were wrong and if I alone

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had discovered the truth about him. There was only one scolding note in our talk. When I told him that I was writing a new biography, he quoted,

*Lives of great men all remind us
When departing in our turn,
We should never leave behind us,
Letters that we ought to burn.*

Dean Inge has written, ' . . . I have given strict orders that no memoir of me shall be published after my death.' He has also written ' I cannot understand how anyone can wish to write an autobiography, unless, indeed, he wants to leave a flattering and by no means honest self-portrait . . . The typical ambitious man, I suppose, faces his prospective biographer with equanimity. He has kept him in his mind's eye from the first.'

I think this is a rather bitter view of the ' typical ambitious man.' The two men whose lives I know well, through study of documents, who no doubt come into Dean Inge's description are the late Lord Melchett and the late Lord Inchcape. They were too spontaneous and too busy to see the years of their lives in the form of chapters for a book. Neither of them left any but a few pages of notes to feed the biographer on his way. Lord Inchcape's most important and self-revealing letters were destroyed, by his wish. I think Dean Inge would be surprised if he examined the conscience that lies behind the grave face of his ' typical ambitious man ' ; surprised

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to find perhaps, that there is an earnest struggle towards truth and character in Leadenhall street as well as in an English Cathedral, although by different ways and in a different language.

I am not interested when I am among business men in the same way as I would not be interested to make my life among Esquimos : because I cannot speak or understand their tongue. But my two prolonged studies of ' typical ambitious ' men have convinced me that there is an aristocracy among financiers as there is among priests, and that ethics, unselfishness and the building up of human life and self-respect is strong in the purposes of great business men as well as in the purposes of the Church.

I think Dean Inge is a little hard on men who write autobiographies. In this craft, as in any other, it is through manners that the autobiographer damns or excuses himself. Vanity, pomposity and bad manners are dangers to the man who sits down to write about himself. But I wonder if it is not because Dean Inge has found such a wide and brilliant outlet for his store of experience in writing and preaching that he does not feel the need to exploit this other pulpit which he deplores ? Surely any form of art, approached with talent, fortified by conscientiousness and capacity for work, is autobiographical. Sargent's portraits of the Wertheim family provide us with a wide view of Sargent himself. Scott's novels, Aubrey Beardsley's drawings, Walt Disney's cinematograph films, Herring's horses and, through the fine writing of Strachey's

Queen Victoria, glimpse at Strachey's own pettiness and disappointment; surely these are forms of autobiography as self-revealing in essentials, as the more frank form of written recollections? Dean Inge would be the last man to pretend that the pulpits of the Church were free of vanity, exhibitionism and scholarly display and the first to admit that the struggle towards honesty and clean thinking is no stronger among priests than among men in other professions. I think that if he came to know some of the great and good men of business he would be surprised at the wide knowledge and practice of the sermon preached at Capernaum. I would forget many sermons I have heard, to remember one story told to me of Lord Inchcape by his forester in Scotland. The man was walking on the fringe of a plantation of trees as Lord Inchcape passed in his car, having returned from a journey to India. He stopped the car and called the man over to him. 'I have been driving about for some time, to see all the changes,' he said. 'You have made the place very beautiful. . . . It is very kind of you.'

On one more occasion I met Dean Inge, a few months before he retired. I had the pleasure of dining at the Deanery on the evening of the day during which the purchase of the Codex Bible had been discussed by the Trustees of the British Museum. The Archbishop of Canterbury was among Mrs. Inge's guests. He had been at the meeting of the Trustees and towards the end of dinner the talk drifted on to the rights and wrongs of the

purchase. For a young man it must always be stimulating to sit at table and listen to talk of the last century. I often wonder if the people of the oldest living generation ever know the magic they dispel to the young at a dinner table. We sit in silence, passing for stupid oafs, maybe. But the miracle is no less wonderful to us because we are silent, as we listen to the tales of yesterday. The old hands sweep the curtains of time aside and show us another century. The talk at Dean Inge's table moved to contemporary affairs and it dwelt upon the meeting at the British Museum. The Archbishop had addressed the Trustees and he told us of what had been said in regard to the payment of the sum of one hundred thousand pounds to the Soviet Government. Dean Inge had been silent at the end of the table. Suddenly the quiet, considered voice began and *we* were silent. 'Instead of sending them one hundred thousand pounds, why not dig up Karl Marx's bones from Highgate Cemetery and send them those? They would no doubt appreciate them more than we do,' he said.

We laughed then. But I doubt if one of us thought of anything else on the way home. Our civilisation was criticised and laid bare in two sentences.

One felt the rare spur of having been near to a man to whom religion was a daily experience and not an intangible hotch-potch of promises for the world to come: a man who, at the end of his life at St. Paul's, was able to declare, 'We cannot make a religion for others, and we ought not to let others

make a religion for us,' and then add 'Our own religion is what life has taught us.'

The danger of a state religion, with Royal Arms emblazoned upon the windows of its churches and effigies of Kings and soldiers in its Cathedrals, is that the simple figure of Jesus the Nazarene may become obscured in the æsthetic glory. I felt this fear many times when I first learned to worship in English Cathedrals. The danger has ruined many once faithful people. The Prophet casting the idols out of the Kaaba, and Cromwell mutilating the stone saints in the English Cathedrals were equally afraid of the sin creeping in upon their people. They also were shocked by the sight of the money-changers in the temple. The sin might easily destroy the Anglican Church if its prelates were not chosen with sublime care, so that the sane balance is maintained between the plain van of the Non-conformists and the gorgeous chariots of Rome. I realised how zealously this tradition had been guarded by men of character, in the summer of 1931, when I was privileged to stay in the same house as Lord Davidson. This was a few weeks after he had resigned from Lambeth.

I turn back a few lines and repeat Dean Inge's sentence, 'Our own religion is what life has taught us.' From the first day upon which Lord Davidson had come to Queen Victoria, he had been marked out for a more exciting existence than falls to most men. He was then Chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury. The Queen, who had an uncanny instinct

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for people and who seldom tolerated a second-rate person, was aware of Randall Davidson's character and talents from the beginning. She saw in the young chaplain who was sent to her, the mature, wise Archbishop. In her judgment of men, she was seldom wrong. It was through her influence that Randall Davidson's first promotion came to him. It was at her suggestion that he was made Dean of Windsor and afterwards Bishop of Rochester. At the end of his life, he seemed to hold in his gentle, old frame, the essence of a century. No prelate of the Anglican Church had ever enjoyed such an influence in other countries: the Patriarchs of Eastern Churches leaned upon him as upon a father. When men have lived unselfishly, working for the good of mankind, without sentimental humbug, growing nearer and nearer to the mysteries of life, they seem to be allowed one glimpse of the final revelation before they die. Most of us have seen the calm, unearthly expression in the eyes of some aged man whom we have loved. One does not need to be either emotional or religious to be intimidated and awed before this mystery. Perhaps it is the sense of safety with which they approach death which gives them this calm. All one knows is that their cup of tranquillity overflows and that one is allowed to taste the drops that fall. Lord Davidson was blessed with this calm, when I met him. For five days I was allowed, by slow advances, to learn what depths of character there were in the man who had ruled Britain's religious life from the old rooms

of Lambeth Palace. He was not in the least 'heavy' with his saintliness. Numberless little jokes and stories lightened the serious pattern of his knowledge. One has only to recall the farewell dinner which was given to him at The Athenæum, to realise how much humour there was to leaven the experience of seventy years. He told his scholarly contemporaries the story of the Babu who wrote to him from India, pleading for his help because, the poor man complained, he had been left 'with his dead brother's issues, one adult and one adultress.' He could not have gleaned these brighter flowers of humour from his life without a full comprehension of his office: without knowing that Heaven itself, whatever its form might be, would not be without its little jokes.

One afternoon while Lord Davidson was staying at Windsor, I was allowed to walk with him through the cloisters. The heraldic beasts of the Tudor kings had lately been added to the pinnacles of St. George's Chapel and as we walked out of the cloisters into the open garden, we saw the bronze pennants, held by the stone beasts, flashing in the sunlight. When St. George's was opened by the King in 1931, after the restoration work of the previous nine years, these beasts changed the skyline of the castle. The original beasts had been removed at Christopher Wren's order, because they were decayed and dangerous. For more than three hundred years, the stone pinnacles of the chapel were bare. Lord Davidson had been Dean of Windsor in the 'eighties and during this time, the architects examined the roof and found

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deep holes in the pinnacles which had been left when the shafts of the beasts were removed in the seventeenth century. The rain and wind of three hundred years had blown over them but, until Lord Davidson came, nobody had ever been curious enough to pry into the crevices. While the workmen were cutting the pinnacles, they came upon some bones hidden in the holes. Some of the clergy of St. George's imagined that the bones might be relics of Saints, hidden in the pinnacles when the chapel was built. They wished to give the bones a sombre burial. Lord Davidson said to me, 'there was a cynic among them and he sent some of the bones up to London to be examined by a doctor.' The story of the saints was exploded. The bones were from the stags of the Windsor Park, and they had been carried to the pinnacles and dropped in by the jackdaws which nested in the chestnut trees near by.

Chapter Eight

THERE is one aspect of snobbery from which I have never wished to escape and this is my worship for grand names. Perhaps it is that long digging into the past makes one doubly conscious of the ancestral background of a living man. This name worship has not always been based on snobbery. I was once delighted to meet the man whose grandfather invented plush and I enjoyed a glow of pleasure when I met Mr. Condry whose great grandfather was said to have invented Condry's crystals. When I was at Wembley in 1924, I met Henry James Pain, who talked of his fireworks as a violinist might speak of his Stradivarius. His ancestor's had made gun-powder in the reign of Charles II and Henry James Pain, a smiling, jolly man, seemed to sparkle like a very charming firework himself.

I can never meet Prince Otto Von Bismarck without being almost giddy in my mind at the splendour of his name. I recall one day when I went to see him at the German Embassy. We were talking of some contemporary problem and he had told me a long and interesting story of an experience in Germany. At the end he paused and the moment came for me to answer him. I merely stared. It seemed to be only half possible that a Bismarck could be living in London in 1934. As he talked to me, I went back through the years to 1878. Disraeli

was dining with the Iron Chancellor on the famous evening before the signing of the Treaty of Berlin. I heard the deep voice of the first Bismarck : I saw the room in which they sat after dinner, heavy with smoke. ' It gave the last blow to my shattered constitution,' Beaconsfield complained. He had returned to England with the ringing cry of ' peace with honour ' ; back to his lonely house, where the flowers from Windsor were waiting for him. It was the illustrious Bismarck's voice I heard, in the little room of the German Embassy in 1934 ; the deep voice which had said, ' DER ALTE JUDE, das ist der Mann.'

This habit of throwing myself back into history has sometimes brought me unusual experiences. In the summer of 1929, I went to Germany for my holiday. A young German whose ancestors had ruled one of the Duchies in Thuringia from the eleventh century, had planned my journey for me. I travelled across the country with an English friend and we came to Jena, where our host was waiting for us. He was too young to have been a soldier and when the disaster of 1918 came to his family, he had deserted his princely magnificence for the humorless erudition of a German professor. When I joined him, we embarked on two weeks of sight-seeing which almost killed me. We visited as many as four and five castles each day. Our host was kind in his own cruel way. As I drove through the pine forests from castle to castle, the young man bombarded me with historical facts. There was no

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cessation. Dates fell about me like confetti and made as little impression. At the end of a long family history, including every marriage for three hundred years, he would say, 'You understand all?'

I always answered 'Yes,' in a weak voice.

'Then whom did the Landgraf Ernst marry in the early sixteenth century?' he would ask.

I could not answer.

'Ah, you say you are historical student and you remember nothing I say. I do not understand the English mentality.'

I apologised in a humble voice, but my stupidity did not stem the tide of his information. This went on day after day. I fell upon my bed at night, counting rococo rooms, musical clocks, mausoleums, orangeries, portraits, busts and fountains, just as sane men fight insomnia by counting sheep. In the morning, he would come to me. 'To-day I am wax in your hands,' he would say. But the gentle promise was not fulfilled. There would follow a recital of historical facts about the first castle on our morning programme. We motored through stretches of cool, dusty forest, only to climb still another mountain and be flung into still another succession of flamboyant, ugly rooms.

'This castle has one hundred chambers,' he would say.

'Oh, yes,' I would answer, feebly realising that not a brush cupboard or a box-room would be passed without being opened for me. Even when darkness came, I was not allowed to rest. One night

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he dragged me from my dinner to climb a mountain and see the Schwartzburg by moonlight. We found the postern gate wide open and my eager host induced us to follow him within. 'Here is the romantic beauty of Germany,' he said. We scrambled over stones and about neglected gardens, seeking the point from which the moon would be most beautiful. When we returned to the gates, we found them locked. Vicious dogs began to bark and the lodge keeper's wife appeared at a window. No, she would not descend. 'You can stay there all night! I am dressed as Adam's wife was dressed and I am not venturing out in the cold.' We waited. The dogs seemed to come nearer, so we scrambled over walls and gates, sometimes dangling above a precipice, deep and terrible, until we found a mountain track which gave us escape. Torn by brambles, tired and angry, I made a faint protest at the end. 'You have seen a German castle by moonlight,' my guide told me. 'Schiller or Goethe would envy you your experience. You wish to be a writer! You *must* see a German castle by moonlight.'

Only twice my friend paused to allow me a respite. One day he said, 'We now come to the schloss where Doktor Martin Luther translate ze bible.' We climbed the mountain slope to the Wartburg and we found the stains upon the wall made when Luther threw his ink pot at the devil. We leaned upon the desk at which Luther wrote. 'Here,' said my host, 'is a place of German poesy. Here you will write a poem.'

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He took me out upon the mountain slope, dragging me by the hand. Exhausted, I sat upon the ground, I was stubborn as a mule after he had pulled me up and down a mile of mountain track. 'Here I give you a pencil and paper and you write a poem of nature,' he said.

He left me then, saying, 'I come back in twenty minutes.' Still wishing to please him, I wrote down with false erasures and stumblings, a sonnet which I had composed ten years before. Then I fell back and slept.

He was pleased when he came back, and deeply assured of my talent. 'You have great poesy,' he told me. On another day, he paused between castles and said to us, 'Now we drive into the forest and be alone with nature.' We were forced up a slope of forty-five degrees, over tree stumps, into perilous hollows. At last the car refused to move another inch. Here we sat, the radiator of the car pointed skywards, in painful and ridiculous discomfort. 'Here are the sounds of the birds and the beauties of nature,' we were told. I was about to giggle and I did not dare to look at my friend. For twenty minutes we sat there. Then we were allowed to continue our journey. 'All German people love nature, but not English people, I think,' was his sly way of telling us that he had seen the expressions upon our faces.

I wilted when we came to Coburg. The first night in the Goldene Traube Hotel, I dreamed that I had myself been turned into a castle. I was

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conscious of my rococo stomach, divided into vast rooms, with thrones and tile stoves and looped curtains and a great clock with mechanical figures, playing a theme from the Meistersinger. This, all within me. Apparently my dream was so terrible that I screamed in my sleep. My English friend came into my room and shook me awake. For a few minutes, I whimpered and clung to his arm. Then I pleaded, ' *Please* do not let him show me any more castles.' With the assurance of a kindly and understanding English voice, I went off to sleep again. This sounds amusing to me now. But in truth I was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. I rested for a day and then the castle stalking began again. This time, I came upon one of the most precious experiences of my life.

Coburg is blessed with many little English memorials. On the day when Prince Albert set out to cross the channel and visit his cousin in England, the enchanting little Duchy came into the English story. There is a bronze Prince Albert in the Market Place, with geraniums about its feet, flowering there through the gift of Queen Victoria. There are oaks which she planted in the 'forties, when she was a young bride, and there is one tree which she planted, towards the end of her life, when she came here for the last time old and tired and alone. I sat in the room in which she had pleaded with the Emperor of Austria for a more kindly tolerance of the Prussian cause. I was refreshed at the sight of so much that belonged to the history of England.

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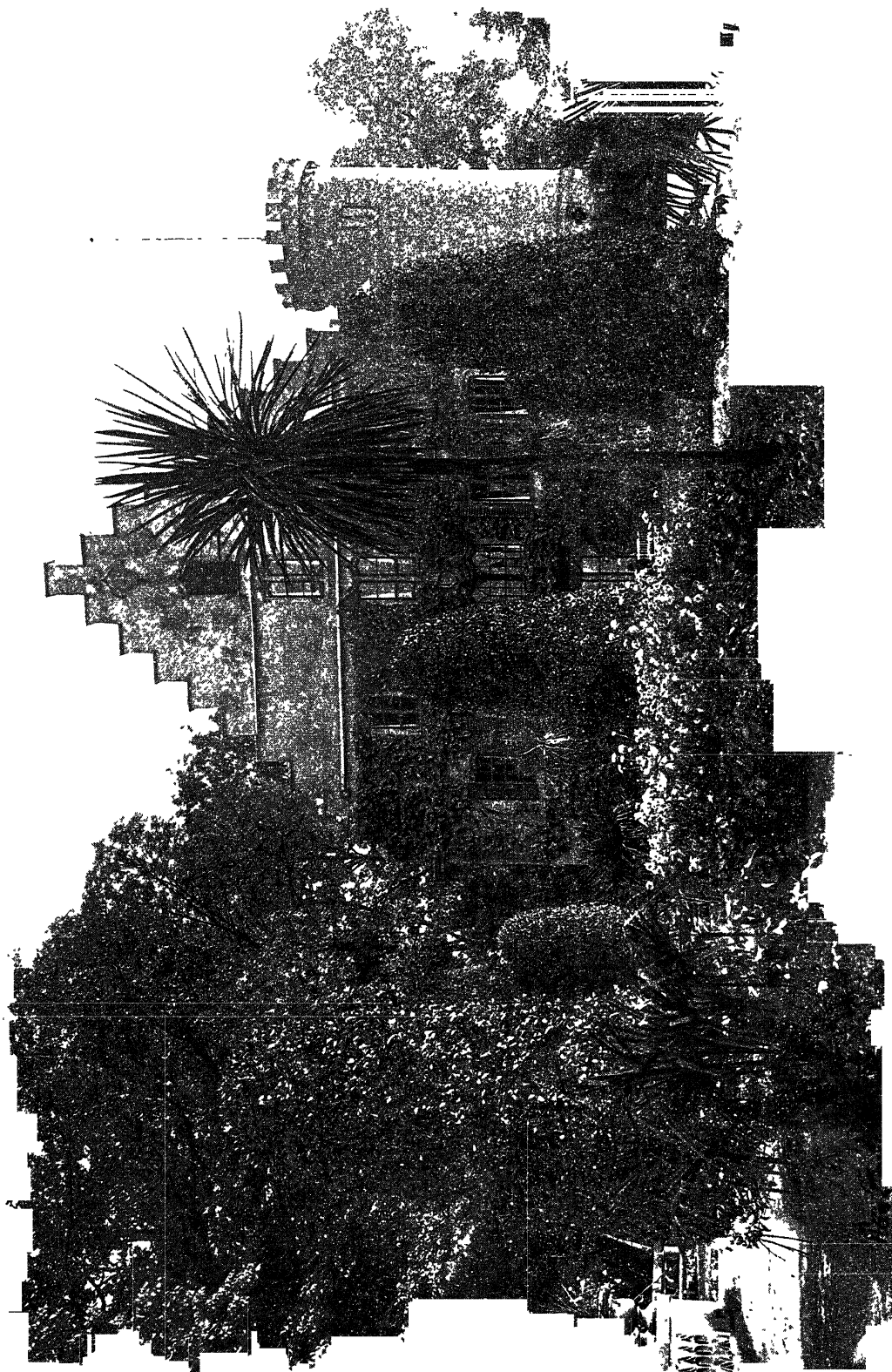
In the morning of the first day we climbed to the mountain top and there, with the walls of the castle about us and in the shade of the lime tree beneath which Luther sat, translating the psalms, we stood in contentment, looking out over the valley in which the harvesters were working, in gay blue blouses. Their little trolleys trundled over the stones and their voices came up over the grass slopes, full and musical. In the afternoon, I was to meet Prince Hubertus of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, a great grandson of Queen Victoria and Prince Albert. He had promised to take us to Rosenau, the minute, sham Gothic castle in which Prince Albert was born. Prince Hubertus met us after luncheon. He was young, perhaps eighteen, and as full of charm as our guide was full of information. Here at last was a young German who did not catechise me on the history of his country. We entered the park of Rosenau which lies some miles from the town, and found an old gardener in his cottage. He stumbled towards us, past a rose garden which the Prince Consort had planted when he was a boy. The gardener was so old that he talked of Queen Victoria's visits as if they had happened yesterday. I had stepped out of my century, back into the 'fifties. The castle door was opened for us and we climbed a spiral stone staircase, dim and damp and smelling of cheese. Nobody had lived there for eight years. We came to a succession of 'kitsch' rooms, ugly, but all heavy with memories. There was a little Gothic dining-room, with even the ceiling paper painted with Gothic designs. Here

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Queen Victoria and Prince Albert had dined alone upon the contented day when she first walked with him in the gardens of his childhood home. They had come from the blazing limelight and the incessant duties of London, to be quiet. We read in the Queen's diary of their walk in the woods. They paused by a pool which Prince Albert had known as a child. He knelt down and made a drinking cup for her with his hands. I came very near to them in the little dark room in which they had dined. There was a bedroom, with a blue ceiling sprinkled with silver stars, in which Prince Albert's mother had slept on her wedding night. This room she had thought to be 'the most elegant of all: "her" gold dressing table, another made of marble, a marble chest of drawers and a big bed with white and green draperies . . . the framework made of bronze.'

At last we came to the east side of the castle and to a small bedroom which was dark and musty. Prince Hubertus opened the squeaky shutters and allowed a deluge of golden sunlight to burst into the room, revealing Empire furniture and on the wall, an enchanting portrait of a little boy, with golden hair. It was a painting of Prince Albert and this was the room in which he had been born. Two sounds came in from the garden: the sparkling note of the fountain water splashing on the stones and the deep, throaty gurgle of the river below.

On the morning of Prince Albert's birth, in August of 1819, his grandmother had sat in the room and she had written of the fountain and of the river in her



diary. The incidents and the scenes were so real to me that all else was obscured. I was alone in the room with Prince Hubertus for a few minutes. It seemed significant that I should be talking to the great-grandson of the Prince who was born there : still more so when we realised, as we talked, that this was Prince Albert's birthday : that the harvesters in the fields, the sunshine, the voice of the river and the whole summer scene were those upon which he had opened *his* ears and eyes more than a hundred years before. It was on this day that I decided to write the life story of the Prince Consort. In the months that followed, I went again and again to the little garden. I came to know the slopes upon which Prince Albert had played soldiers : the door of the castle which he had 'stormed' with his wooden sword.

No powers which are morbid or supernatural are needed if we wish to discover and know the dead. I often feel a little sorry for lonely people who attend seances and try to receive audible messages from those whom they once loved, or to ask for signs to show that they still exist. It seems pathetic when the posters on the London omnibuses announce that some venerable parent has spoken with his dead son. There is knowledge of those who have departed from this world more full and wonderful than that of which the spiritualists seem to dream. If one has known the heart and the mind of a man, the heart and the mind are with one long after death. There is nothing of spiritualism or sadness in this

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knowledge which is the normal fruit of love. I have lived in a house for many years in which there has been much of death. Six years ago a boy died while he was still in the laughing beauty of his teens. He was at the age when he had begun to enjoy the full excitement of life. We loved him deeply. He died quickly, without pain. I have never known any outward reproach against fate from those who loved him. When the first sadness passed, only the joy remained. Sometimes, when spring comes, when the forsythia breaks into topaz blossoms on the wall, we feel that he should be with us. He flourished with the spring, leaping up the stairs three at a time, filling the house with his noise, and running into a room, to kick the behind of some older member of the family, in the ecstasy of his happiness. This is as he remains with us. Our stories are always, 'Oh, do you remember when . . . went to his first dance and forgot his key so that he had to crawl in through the window?' Then we laugh and enjoy the first and only spring of his manhood all over again.

I had already enjoyed an adventure among old papers, in 1924 when I joined my friend the Dean of Windsor in editing the letters of his aunt, Lady Augusta Stanley. Lady Augusta had been the best beloved of Queen Victoria's ladies-in-waiting. She was an intelligent, witty woman; neither a blue stocking nor a prig. The letters which we read were written to her sister, over a period of thirty-five years, and they had not been seen since they

were received by Lady Frances Baillie, between the years 1835 and 1870. Night after night we sat in a beautiful room above the cloisters at Windsor, reading the faded pages. The efforts to decipher the cramped, cross-handwriting with a magnifying glass were more and more exciting as the character of Lady Augusta became real to us. There were great bundles of letters, beginning with the quiet days when she was with the Duchess of Kent and her little Court at Frogmore. The story they told moved on to the death of the Prince Consort, through the lonely years of the Queen's widowhood and then to Lady Augusta's new life, when she married Dean Stanley of Westminster. They were all human, intimate letters, revealing the heart and mind of the writer so that one came to know her well : so well in the end, that her judgments, her kindliness and her smile became part of our everyday life. When the book was almost ended, after a year of deciphering, transcribing and editing, we often found ourselves talking of Lady Augusta in a chatty way. 'As Lady Augusta would have said,' prefaced a comment. 'Lady Augusta would have liked that,' followed a comic story, for her humour bubbled through her letters, from the beginning to the end. In brief, she became our friend. She shared our sense of humour. Her existence was a joy to us and we needed neither mediums nor planchettes to talk with her and laugh with her. I found myself examining problems in the light of her experience and nobleness of judgment, as if she were a living

being from whom I sought encouragement and advice.

Five years afterwards, when I began to write Prince Albert's life, I began the same kind of adventure again. For three years, I thought of little else but my work. I went to Coburg and there I found the eight bundles of letters which he had written to his brother over a period of twenty years. The present Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha, a grandson of Prince Albert, was especially kind to me. The first idea of writing the book had come to me on the summer day when I walked through Rosenau with his son, Prince Hubertus. Now came the practical help of the Duke himself. The archives were opened for me and I was allowed to use the precious letters as I wished. No other biographer had apparently thought of searching for them.

During his first, lonely years in England, when nobody understood him, Prince Albert's brother had been his only confidant and the letters he wrote to him were his one safe channel for self-revelation. Through them, I came to know Prince Albert so well that I was sometimes alarmed by the curious experiences which came to me. I found in the end that I was more conscious of his criticism of my work than of the criticism of any living person. He became the arbiter of taste and I even felt the confidence of collaboration with him as I sought among the documents for his story. I finished the book on a summer day in London. It had been my life for three years and when the last word was written, when I knew

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that I had done my best to reveal him to an unheeding generation (to whom he was a figure of fun), I was bereft.

I was fortunate in forsaking the writing of novels for biography, for the change came to me when the reading of biographies was the height of fashion. One's work was therefore made more interesting through competition and a sharpened standard of criticism among reviewers. It is supposed that readers became tired of novels and that they turned to biographies of their own accord. I think that the change came first to the authors. Novels had become more and more dull. One recalls those melancholy records of the repressions of lonely, misunderstood women: records of self-pity, going on and on, without plot or story. They were boring to read and, to an author with any life in him at all, they must have been boring to write. Yet the fashion was upon us. I myself had written three novels before my life of the Prince Consort was published. The first was, of course, pure autobiography: a story in which I presented myself as a misunderstood, wistful child, suffering in a cruel, insensitive, colonial world. I did not know that I was merely selfish and in need of spanking. Most of us begin in this way; a novel such as this is the measles of authorship. I wrote a second novel. My American publisher told me, without reading it, that it 'placed me in a niche among the masters of modern prose.' I was not made dizzy by his compliment, but I was encouraged to begin a third novel. This was a

failure, although I have the review of a devotee in Canada which tells me that my prose was 'like a stream with the sunlight on it.' The public did not agree and I went through the strange and unprofitable sensation of being 'remaindered.' This is supposed to be the basest humiliation an author may suffer. During the months that follow, he is frequently assailed by people who say, 'Oh, I bought a copy of your book, brand new, for one shilling and I enjoyed it immensely.' The sting is all the more bitter because not a farthing of the lowly shilling comes to the author. I was undaunted. I began a fourth novel which was to be an epic of the middle ages. There was to be no action in my story and little plot. Only psychology, for I was still very young and I thought it clever to create people who enjoyed pages upon pages of morbid introspection. All the characters were to be either decadent, wicked or dying. There was to be neither beauty, hope nor humour in my tale. I thought that a mediaeval castle would be a suitable setting for my characters. It was to find such a castle that I went to Germany in the summer of 1929, but the good fortune of finding the Prince Consort's letters in the archives of Coburg turned me from the plan of my beastly novel. It was a happy release, for I embarked upon a great adventure which ridded me of my wish to write morbid novels, forever. Perhaps other writers who have turned from fiction to biography have enjoyed the same experience, learning that it is more wonderful to one's self as a

worker to build up a character out of documents and evidence than to make a novel from the filaments of one's own imagination. The triumph for the writer comes when the biography is published and not reviewed as an essay in writing : when the actual subject of the biography is discussed and the writer is forgotten. Unless the biographer is a vain fool, he is pleased to be overlooked in the reviews which follow.

I believe that there is something more important than fashion or taste in the public wish to read more and more biographies. I like to think that the history of the past thirty-five years helps us to understand why fiction and history, written in the Victorian manner, have failed to hold the interest of the reading public. Ever since the beginning of the century, there have been soldiers and politicians who have tried to impress upon us that the history of mankind lies in the rise and fall of nations : that actions are more powerful than motives. The mass of people are no longer satisfied with this creed of realism and they have turned with the modern biographer to the inner history of mankind, which is told in the story of the slow growth of human nature.

The Victorian biographers were usually satisfied with a record of the actions of the man about whom they were writing. The modern biographer, with all his faults, is trying to dig deeper than this and to discover the motives which lie behind the acts of his subject. Providing he does not fall a victim to his own theories or become drugged by his own cleverness,

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he may be able to indicate the place which the subject of his biography fills, as a stepping-stone in the progress of human nature : to prove that it is through his motives and not through his acts that a truly great man makes his contribution to history. It is not because the giants of the past were clever in their actions that we venerate them, but because they were noble in their purposes. It is, I think, the wish and the duty of the modern biographer to reveal this nobleness of human nature in his work.

My worship of great names, which I plead to be a harmless form of snobbery, led to a pleasant experience some years ago when I was still living at Windsor. One Sunday afternoon some Etonians came to tea. The day was warm and we had planned a walk in the park. When the boys came into the room I was a little surprised when one of them said to me, 'This is my friend Tennyson.' I shook hands with a slim boy, with friendly brown eyes and a shock of unruly golden hair. He was the great-grandson of the poet. As we walked down the hill towards the cedars of Frogmore, I found that young Penrose Tennyson was devoted to the memory of his ancestor, not through vain pride but with a deep and unself-conscious knowledge of his poetry. We were walking over ground upon which Tennyson himself had walked one day, when he travelled to Windsor to see the Queen. Penrose Tennyson was brimful of good stories of his great-grandfather : none surprised me more than the account of the day when Thomas Edison went to the Isle of Wight, to make records of

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Tennyson's voice on his new and magical phonograph. Penrose Tennyson told me that the original cylindrical wax records were in the British Museum and that his family possessed one set, upon which the voice of the poet had become a little dim.

I have met people who recall the beauty of Lord Tennyson's voice. For some years after my walk in the park at Windsor, I thought again and again of the records and I wondered if I should ever be allowed to hear them. Now and then, I met somebody who remembered him : one old lady, born in the 'fifties, could recall the day on which he drove over to see the Queen at Osborne. It was the visit which the Queen describes in her Journal. He came and stayed with her for an hour, 'very shaky on his legs' but 'very kind.' It was in the later years of his life, when they were both grown old. The Queen and Tennyson had been born in the reign of George the Third and they were both monarchs in their own way. I know of few scenes in Queen Victoria's story as poignant as the leave-taking of the poet. The fighter was dead in him and the graciousness and mellowness of age was touching him as he neared death. He said to the Queen, as she rose to leave him, 'You are so alone on that terrible height. I have only a year or two more to live, but I am happy to do anything for you I can.'

The Victorian who recalled Tennyson to me, gave me a less gentle picture than this. She told me the story of the poet walking in a garden with a young

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woman who bored him. 'What birds are they that call *Maud! Maud!*?' he asked her.

The wretched girl answered, 'Larks, Lord Tennyson.'

'No,' he roared. 'Rooks, you fool.'

'He was the rudest man I have ever known,' the Victorian told me. 'One day I went to his house in the Isle of Wight and I arrived to find many people in the drawing-room. Somebody came over to me, whispered to me and said, "Ask him to recite some of his poems." I asked him, and he grumbled "Yes." Then somebody said, "He must recite in a room with no more than one door so that he will not be disturbed." We climbed up and up to an attic room at Tennyson's heels. Then somebody said, "He must smoke while he is reading his poems. Do you mind?" I said that I did not mind, so he lighted his pipe and began to read. His voice was like a fog-horn. Suddenly he stopped and said to me, "I do not suppose you understand a word I am saying." What could I answer? I didn't.'

The story did not lessen my wish to hear the phonograph records of Tennyson's voice. The fortunate evening came in the summer of 1934 when I again met Penrose Tennyson. He was no longer a slim school boy with a shock of golden hair. Curiously enough, he was working on the film of *The Iron Duke*, under Mr. George Arliss. More than eighty years before, Tennyson had written the ode for the funeral of the Duke, in 1852. I dined with Penrose Tennyson in his father's house

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in Chelsea. He greeted me in a sitting-room which was dominated by an engraving of the noble head of his great grandfather. The walls of the room were covered by book-cases, reaching almost to the ceiling, as book-cases should. When dinner was ended, we returned to the sitting-room and Penrose Tennyson placed a comical old phonograph upon the table. The mechanism was simple and the crinkled old tin horn was not more than fourteen inches long. Penrose took eight small cardboard boxes from a drawer. He lifted them reverently, for they held the precious records. The ceremony of winding the old machine might have been a conjuring trick, to invoke the past. The noises of the phonograph were the wheezes of age. I was carried back to the scene at Osborne and then to the day upon which Tennyson and Edison met at Farringford. Penrose turned the handle of the little machine once more. He lowered the sapphire point on to the sensitive wax cylinder, now revolving slowly and reflecting the light. Faintly, a voice came to us, through the fog of fifty years. The first verse was so dim that I had to lean close to the horn to identify the words in the whisper :—

*Ask me no more : the moon may draw the sea ;
The cloud may stoop from heaven and take the
shape,
With fold to fold, of mountain or of cape ;
But O, too fond, when have I answer'd thee ?
Ask me no more.*

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For the second verse, the voice gained power and the deeper notes were rich and full blooded as in the voice of a living man.

Ask me no more : what answer should I give ?

I love not hollow cheek or faded eye :

Yet, O my friend, I will not have thee die !

Ask me no more, lest I should bid thee live ;

Ask me no more.

The great voice reached its fullest power in *The Charge of the Light Brigade*. The delicate cylinder gave forth the ringing and heroic lines. From these grand phrases, the voice faded again and I listened to *Maud*.

I said to the rose, 'The brief night goes

In babble and revel and wine.

O young lord-lover, what sighs are those,

For one that will never be thine ?'

I was in a dream. Death and time seemed less frightening when one could capture illusions such as this, for the voice was real to me and it rang in my ears as I walked out of the house into a gentle shower of summer rain. The deep, sonorous cry, 'Ask me no more,' rings in my memory still : the voice of the great man, imprisoned in a cylinder of wax and kept alive in a box for more than half a century.

Chapter Nine

IN March of 1931 I was asked to join in a strange and pleasant adventure. The Directors of the German State Railways invited two writers from almost every country in Europe to gather in the Rhineland and see the birth of the German spring in the forest. We met in Darmstadt: Swedes, Frenchmen, Americans, Danes, Italians, Dutchmen and Englishmen. I did not speak their languages enough to attempt any but the most trivial conversations. They were less stupid and most of them spoke English: at least enough to allow me to be lazy and answer them in my own tongue.

From Darmstadt we set off to discover the spring. From the beginning I was afraid that I would not be able to stand in the company of two Dutchmen, two Frenchmen, two Italians, two Swedes, two Germans and one other Englishman and observe the first stalwart blue-bell waving in the March wind, without smiling. As we walked through the woods, there were no romantic pretences; no skippings nor liltings. We were all very serious, and what might have been a graceful journey became a grim enterprise. Each man in turn came near me to practice his English. One of the Frenchmen deplored the celibacy forced upon him in our 'what you call in English your stag-party,' but he was delighted

because he was able to save money while his flat in Paris was closed. One of the Germans wedged himself in between us and complained of his great hunger. Then he said, 'You have in England the philosophers Ber-naard Shaw and Aldous Huxley which I read. I like also the characteristic novels of your John Galsworthy.' I could not share his latter enthusiasm, so I encouraged him to talk of Mr. Bernard Shaw. (This was at seven o'clock in the morning and neither my liver nor my temper was sweet).

'You have personal reminiscences of Mr. Ber-naard Shaw, perhaps?'

'Yes,' I answered, 'he is a very kind old gentleman who swims in the morning and eats nothing but lettuce.'

'Nothing but lettuce?' asked the German.

'No, never anything but lettuce.'

'He is a strong man?' he asked.

'He carries the weight of the world on his shoulders,' I answered.

'Ah,' he gurgled (the gurgle was rich, coming from the great sound-box of his stomach). 'Ah, you are making jokes.'

I did not feel this to be wholly true.

We walked on deeper into the woods, but nobody looked to right or left. The spring was forgotten.

The Dutchman sidled up to me. 'I wish very much we have our dinner soon,' he said. 'You have the English dinner, 'am and ex

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or ros beef?' I turned a verse over in my mind :—

*To be greedy sir, at breakfast,
Is but a sign of the beast,
I like the simple motto,
'An oeuf is as good as a feast.'*

'I like very much the English dinner, or you say, breakfast. I have this in my 'otel in Russell Square when I am in Lon-don,' he said. Then came a sentence which is word-perfect in my memory to this day. 'But when I am upon a sojourn in some other country, there is some disintegration of my livers and I am not happy at these feasts.'

We found the spring for which we came. Solemnly, the ambassadors of the nations stood about a pretty glade. The shafts of silver and amber sunlight came down from the crisp green bower above us, touching the blue-bells, the primroses and the crocuses. Spring was never born in greater beauty, but I was the philistine who laughed at the christening. 'Wunderbar,' muttered the German. His jaw hung heavily and he frowned. 'Molto bello,' said the Italian. Each contributed his compliment, except one of the Englishmen who seemed to be looking at the scene in the third person. All, except the other Englishmen, bent stiffly and picked a few blossoms. We turned from the glade, each with his nosegay, and we walked back to the town for our breakfast. The second German joined me as we

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came to the edge of the wood. 'Sprechen Sie Deutsch?' he asked me. At that time my German was even more scanty than now.

'Nein,' I answered. 'Mein Deutsch ist sehr krank.'

'Ah! das ist ja komisch. Ihr Deutsch ist sehr krank!'

He then patted his stomach. He then opened his mouth and made the antics of eating with a knife and fork. 'Ja,' I answered. Then I could not for the life of me think of the word *hungrig*. 'Mein Magen ist nicht mit Essen besetzt,' I complained.

The wretched little man then called his compatriot over. 'Dieser Engländer ist mehr Schauspieler als Schriftsteller. Er sagt, dass sein Magen nicht mit Essen besetzt ist. Das ist ja amusant. Das muss ich meiner Frau schreiben.' He turned to me again. 'Ich kann nur zwei englische Wörter, *mixed pickles und water-closet*; dann ist Schluss.' Every time he spoke, he spat at me. I was pleased when the hotel steps divided us and allowed us to walk in, separately, to our breakfasts.

During the morning of the next day, we travelled to the town of X— on the banks of the Rhine. The kindness of our hosts never flagged for one moment and the glimpses of spring which we caught, between meals, were infinitesimal. No sooner had the veal steaks of breakfast disappeared than we were taken off in motor-cars to the Rathaus and then to the cellars of a celebrated vineyard. I was forgotten and left behind because I had insisted upon my morning

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bath and when I went to the door of the hotel, there was no motor car for me ; only a big motor 'bus, which was waiting to take a party of tourists on a sightseeing trip. With a few words and a great deal of fervour, I induced the man to follow in the wake of my party. I was alone in the great 'bus, which jumped from rut to rut down the main street of X—at forty miles an hour. I arrived at the Rathaus where the Bürgermeister was already addressing my colleagues. I had but one foot in the Marktplatz when the ceremony ended and everybody was bundled into the cars again and hurried off to the offices of the wine company. This happened with the fussy speed of a quick-motion film. At eleven o'clock we were seated at a long table and, over the space of an hour, we were asked to taste twenty-seven different wines. I sat next to the Bürgermeister and when my first glass was filled, I began to lift it to my lips. A lesser official on my right slapped my wrist in the manner of a scolding mother and told me that I must not drink before the Bürgermeister. Solemnly we lifted our glasses in unison. I waived some of the wines aside, but, towards the end, they became more rich and rare and, remembering Canon Dalton's advice, I thought that it would be a sin to refuse them. The last two wines were brewed from some fruit more magical even than the grape. They were deep gold as brandy in colour and with a bouquet so thrilling that it penetrated into the last, sleeping corpuscle in my body. With the eighteenth glass, the message of the sweet German

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spring came to me. The final glasses of wine I can never forget. Their scent lingers with me still and all other hocks have tasted like vinegar to me since. My body was transformed and I saw life as a glamorous Fata Morgana. The sullen German journalist from Hanover seemed to become beautiful. The fat Dutchman was slim as Achilles and the Bürgermeister, in his brown boots and greened frock coat, bowed and smiled with the manners of a Stuart courtier. 'This is not wine,' I murmured. 'These grapes were not grown on the banks of the Rhine . . . they are from vines which grew upon the golden slopes of Valhalla?' The Bürgermeister almost cried when I said this. The precious bottle was brought once more and the amber wine was poured forth, for the last time.

Then the nimminy-pimminy man in whose charge we travelled, stood up and said, 'And now we go to see the Cathedral under the personal guidance of the historical student, Herr ——.'

'Bürgermeister,' I pleaded, 'mein lieber Herr Bürgermeister, *please* do not make me go to the Cathedral. I can see all the Cathedrals of the world from here.' And it was true, for Ely, Cologne, Chartres, Hildesheim, St. Peter's, Seville and Cordoba, passed before my eyes, like magic-lantern slides upon a screen.

'Please, Herr Bürgermeister, I have no wish to waste this sweet spring day within a cathedral. Could we not walk beside your storied Rhine?'

So it was that the Bürgermeister of X— took me

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by the arm and walked with me, his rusted coat tails flying, his ruffled top hat nodding gravely—walked with me along the banks of the Rhine.

Next day we were in Darmstadt again, lunching on the fringe of the forest. I was seated next to a man of distinguished looks and manner. He was like Goethe. Perhaps he was aware of the likeness, for his hair was arranged to intensify the character he played. He spoke little English, but we talked with ease. I seldom find lack of language to be a barrier in foreign countries. I have seen so many linguists passing among strange people, without understanding or being understood, that it is rare for me to feel forlorn over my lack of scholarship.

If I may leap from the fringe of the German forest to the edge of the Trans Jordan desert, I should like to recall a spring day when an Arab and myself became lords of language, although neither of us spoke the others tongue. Somewhere later in this book, I shall tell the story of my holiday in Trans Jordan when I stayed with the Amir Abdullah. In the morning the Amir would sometimes allow me to walk with him over the open country which spreads behind the Palace. It was beautiful land, good with wild poppies, black irises and anemones. Every hollow was bright with colour. There was the singing of the larks to excuse our silence as we walked. The only words I knew of Arabic were for *stove* and *apricots*, so I could not talk or do more than smile my pleasure to the Amir when we came upon some fresh, flower-laden fold in earth, a turtle warming himself

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in the sun or a place where the air was sweetened by a crevice, filled with wild stock. One morning we walked beyond our usual way and found a field in which a new little flower was growing. It was minute as a forget-me-not and tinted like a wild rose. It stood perhaps two inches from the earth upon a thin, wiry stem. Myriads of them were spread before us, making a carpet, pale and rosy as snow beneath the rays of the rising sun. The flowers did not move at first, but when a gust of warm wind passed over them, blustering and disturbing, the thousands of little flowers trembled on their stems. The Amir turned to me and smiled. I smiled in return, but we were unable to speak. As the field was becoming calm again, a new gust of wind made the flowers seem to shake with laughter. We stood still, lifting our eyes to see the far edge of the rippling pink field. The Amir touched my arm. I must tell you first that his face responded to his humour and his moods more quickly than any other face I have known. One always melted before his smile. Now he laughed! I laughed! The little blossoms laughed! The gusts of wind passed as we were laughing and the field was quiet again. The Amir clapped his hands. A Yemenite servant came to him from the little company which always followed at his heels. He spoke to the man in Arabic and sent him running off across the field towards the Palace. Ten minutes afterwards, the Yemenite came back to us with a big Arab-English dictionary in his hands. The Amir opened the book and finding the page he

sought, he placed his finger upon a word and held it before me. The English word was *laughing*. In that moment I am vain enough to believe that we became friends.

But I was sitting beside Goethe on the fringe of the Darmstadt forest! We talked, using all our forces of limited vocabulary and smiles and we found it simple to speak to each other. He wished to know why I had come so many miles to see the spring flowers of Germany. 'In England you have a beautiful spring. Why do you come to see the little spring of Darmstadt?' I was frank and I told him that I did not know.

I learned afterwards that the living Goethe who sat next to me was Count Hardenberg, a member of the court of the Grand Duke of Hesse. Like Coburg, Darmstadt has an English air about it. From the day in 1860 when Princess Alice was betrothed to Prince Ludwig of Hesse, the beautiful town had learned to accept the influences which went there with her. She was intelligent and reasonable as well as being gracious: even the revolution and the stark years of change which have come since the war have not removed her name and memory from the town to which she went as a bride, in 1862. She died in December of 1878, but the brief years of her marriage had already brought Darmstadt into England's story. Princess Alice was the best beloved of King Edward's sisters. It was to her that he went in 1873, to stay at Jugenheim, when he escaped from his mother's censorship and the irksome efforts everybody

was making to clip his wings. There he had been able to talk with the Tsar of Russia and to catch his first glimpse of diplomacy among Princes. There he had learned of his brother's betrothal to the Grand Duchess Marie of Russia and he had fostered the hope that the marriage would bury the hatchets of the Crimea. Powerful and intelligent people had listened to him in Darmstadt : he had been able to talk in the presence of his sister without being scolded like a child who has spoken at the table out of turn. Queen Victoria had come to Darmstadt after her daughter's death, to attend the Confirmation Service of her grand-children. In the palaces and Museums there are mementoes of the sixteen years during which the English Princess lived there.

Among the conglomeration of comical family portraits and gilt furniture in the Darmstadt museum, there were two objects over which I sentimentalised with excuse. One was a Prayer Book bound in red velvet. Inside was written ' Given to our beloved Alice on her Wedding-day by her most affectionate mama, Victoria.' The other souvenir was a black box, carved with patterns of English roses. Inside was the Bible which was given to Princess Alice with the ' loyalty and fervent prayer ' of ' the Maidens of the United Kingdom.'

In these days of Herr Hitler's régime, it is strange to walk in the streets and palaces of Coburg and Darmstadt and find the English memorials and souvenirs which have survived from Victorian times. It is pleasant also to find that the two princes who

hold the affection and respect of the people who were once their subjects, more perhaps than any of the other dethroned princes in Germany, are descendants of Queen Victoria. Perhaps they inherited the germ of Liberalism which the other princes in Germany did not accept until it was forced upon them ! At least one knows, after weeks of pleasant holiday and enquiry in both Coburg and Darmstadt, that neither the Duke of Saxe-Coburg-Gotha nor the Grand Duke of Hesse has lost his dignity with his crown and that fourteen years of republicanism have not caused the people in the streets of the beautiful little towns to cease taking off their hats and bowing, as their dethroned rulers walk past.

Count Hardenberg had not been intimidated by the raw, new life of Germany. He was a courtier still, browsing among the memorials of the old régime. Most of the guests who sat with us at our luncheon in Darmstadt were the busy officials of the new order. They fussed and theorised and talked in circles. This older man was a stranger among them and it was quietening for me to find him, to put aside all the brochures and lists of statistics which had been given to me, and talk of yesterday. 'Perhaps you would like to drive with me in the afternoon,' he said. 'I am an old-fashioned man and I do not use a motor-car.'

About three o'clock, a smart, shining brake drove up to my hotel. People who use brakes are always overcome by the perpendicular motif : both Count Hardenberg and the driver sat without wavering a

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millimetre from the upright. The hotel servant, the manager at the door, and even one of the guests suddenly sprang to attention like weighted dolls, and assumed the perpendicular. I straightened my own back and climbed into the brake, recalling my carriage manners from long ago. We set off through the main street of Darmstadt, an elegant trio in an elegant equipage. Old people doffed their hats to Count Hardenberg and little boys turned and ran a yard or two beside us. Strangers gaped and stared. We were soon free from the motley of the town and on the fringe of the woods. Here it was that the society of Hesse went to promenade in the summer evenings of the 'sixties and 'seventies, when there was a British Minister in Darmstadt and when the little court was secure and beautiful, with no threat or thought of the year 1918.

In England we accept our news of Germany from Berlin and it is usually of anger and mistrust. We no longer think of older people who still embrace their memories, afraid perhaps to go out into the strife and confusion which the changes of 1918 have brought to Germany. Yet you will find these old people, if you seek for them in the backwaters. In Herrenhausen, whence the Georges came to England, the old keeper of the museum still wears a grand pin in the shape of a crown, which the Duke of Brunswick gave him. And he still guards the sad, shadowy rooms of the deserted palace, dusting the portraits of princesses whose names are no longer remembered, brushing the stuffed English horses upon which the

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Georges rode, and telling any patient visitor the story of the blind King of Hanover, whose portrait hangs in one of the rooms. There are still a few dusty shrines into which the swastika has not intruded and, even if their days are numbered, they are graceful still. In woods which have been filched from the princes, you will come upon some older keeper who clings doggedly to the feudal principles of his early teaching and, in the streets of Munich, when the Crown Prince Rupprecht appears, there are few who do not bare their heads, bow, and whisper 'seine Majestät,' as he walks past. Even those who belong to the new Germany are not proof against a wistful, backward glance which makes them say, 'Yes, Hitler is our leader, but *he* would have been our King.'

This was the air which we breathed as we drove through the woods of Darmstadt; the air of the lost monarchic Germany. We came upon a farm gate which was opened by a rosy-cheeked Fräulein who bowed and smiled as we drove through. Beneath the trees the multitudes of spring flowers stretched away into the shadows as far as we could see. Now and then we came upon an old woman or a child, bending down to pick flowers for a nosegay. They turned, looked up from their flowers, and called 'Guten Abend,' as we passed. Count Hardenberg bowed with royal grace, or he smiled when the woman was one whom he recalled. We came to an old gate, set between trees, and there we climbed down from the brake. We passed into a garden,

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no longer valeted and preened, yet still beautiful, with vines and flowers which grew and blossomed where they chose. At the far end was a sombre building, of the kind the Victorians usually built for their dead. Count Hardenberg pressed his hand against one of the bronze rose ornaments upon the door, and behind it, a lock was disclosed. He opened the door and we went inside. Upon one side of the mausoleum was the sarcophagus in which Princess Alice is buried. From the mausoleum we went back to the brake and drove on. The light was fading, so we drove quickly, to catch the last warmth of the sun as we came to the edge of the wood. The town was busy, as it was the time for closing the shops. We made our way against a tide of bicycles and came to a big castle, which is now a museum. Count Hardenberg led me through unending rooms, in which hundreds upon hundreds of uniforms were standing upon their half-alive, wooden dummies. Never was such a guard of honour drawn up, even in the illustrious days: a thousand uniforms in scarlet and blue and white and gold, paraded upon their sham bodies and leading us to the last little room in which I saw the wonderful Holbein Madonna which is the pride of the town.

My work of gathering letters and searching in archives, when I was writing the biography of the Prince Consort, led me away from the political bedlam of Berlin, into the countryside, where I found the older and half-forgotten generation of German people. Some of them still lived

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parsimoniously in their castles, surrounded by their forests, their horses and their dogs. Many were poor old courtiers driven into poverty and anxiety because of their meagre pensions and lost estates. One found these sad old men, living in musty rooms, with photographs, old uniforms and glass-eyed stag heads upon the walls, to remind them of their lost years of riches and elegance, when they danced and hunted within the glow of royal favour. In England, we know little of these distressed people. They are proud and inarticulate in their sorrow and even if they chose to raise their voices, they would not be heard above the marching and the bugles of the new régime. To these proud old men, clinging to the remnants of their old dignity, and to some of the peasants, the republic is not a reality. I wish to tell two stories, one of peasants and one of princes, to show the half-forgotten Germany which I came to know and love, long before I went to Berlin or saw the fiery-eyed young Bavarians guarding the doorway of the Brown House in Munich. In January of 1933, I was staying in a house in Ober-Hessen. The surrounding forests belonged to the ancestors of my friend in the tenth century and the revolution had not burned all the feudal thoughts out of the minds of the peasants who lived upon his lands. He came into his inheritance when he was little more than twenty. His cook and butler had served his grandfather and their fidelity brought love and kindness into the house, so generously that one soon forgot the hurly-burly of the world

outside. We used to drink our morning glass of beer in the kitchen with the cook, listen to her stories of the old, gay days, and sniff in the good smells of her steaming food. On special mornings, when she loved us well, we were given a wonderful drink made from beer and eggs. Sometimes in the afternoon we would cross the stable yard and drink our tea with the forester and his wife in their little house. Once the little Jewish cow dealer joined us . . . that was before the expulsion of 1934. The peasants wore their seventeenth century costumes for their festivals and the people of the village knew of the outside world only through the tales of the bell-ringer, who declared the news of the day at noon from their doorsteps.

The house of my friend dispensed medicine, help and patronage among the peasants, just as in the old days when the *Herr Baron* was lord of the land. There was an old soldiers' association in the village near by and on January the twenty-first they were to enjoy their yearly dinner and beer party. My friend, who was no more than a youngster at the end of the war, was their patron, and he was to preside over their celebrations. Many times during the day I found myself pondering on the gap which lay between my raw New Zealand home and the old German castle : the gap between my boyhood feelings over the war and these simple, trusting peasants, who had once been no more than wild and cruel Huns to my young and stupid mind. I had been fed on cartoons of the Emperor as the devil himself,

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with trident and tail. I had wept for Edith Cavell and I had been horrified by the stories of atrocities in Belgium. Isolated on the other side of the world, we knew neither hunger nor physical danger and the war was therefore a horror in our imaginations rather than a menace at our gates. It was not until the hospital ships came home with the wounded men from Gallipoli that we were able to guess what the word *battle* could mean. I had been brought up to hate Germany with all my heart. And here, in 1933, I was a guest among the enemy.

The scene outside was peaceful. Now and then a peasant woman would waddle up over the snow, her black shawl and skirt making her look like a great crow. Far down at the bottom of the garden, the men were sawing the ice on the lake into blocks to be stored in earth vaults for the summer. I could see the butler, whose name was Gans, picking leaves with which to ornament the plates of dessert. I stood at my window for a long time, slowly realising the difference between the fierce colonial youngster who had cried over the 'cruel Huns' and the older, pacified guest in a German house. I wondered, in the event of war coming again, if I could gather my anger together and hate a German enough to wish to kill him.

In the afternoon my friend came to my room. 'I have news for you,' he said. 'The old soldiers wish me to take you with me to their party to-night.' I was pleased, but my pleasure was darkened by a little fear: fear of the loneliness I might feel among a company drawn together to celebrate the days

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when they were soldiers, fighting against my countrymen. They were peasants . . . I could not help wondering what the old soldiers of a small English village might feel if they entertained a German on Armistice Day.

Darkness had already fallen on the forest as we drove off to the village hall. The lofty, still pine trees were heavy with snow. The hall was no more than a low room, joined to the inn. We went first into the innkeeper's room, to eat black bread and sausage with him and his wife before their fire. Their son lay in his bed in one corner and in another corner was the great bed which the two old people shared. When we had eaten our bread and sausage, we went back into the big room in which the old soldiers were sitting. There were about fifty of them, seated at long tables. Their faces, gnarled from labour and cold, were softly gilded by the light from the lamps overhead. Their red hands rested on the tables or they were curled about their hefty beer mugs : their pipes and cigars sent clouds of slow grey smoke up towards the warm lamps. The clothes of the peasants were dark and simple. Fifty tried old soldiers stared at me with calm eyes which did not flicker as I met them with my own. I sat down in silence. An hour passed with drinking and talking and one by one the men at my table drew closer and admitted me to their talk. I answered in broken German. The group about me soon became friends, but in the outer spaces of the room there were forty-five men who did not return my smiles at first. There was

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one old man who was the father of the company. He had fought in the war of 1870. A great beard rested upon his waistcoat, a proud beard, tended affectionately with comb and scissors. He wore big, rough horn buttons on his coat. His fine old head was broad at the eyes and his voice was slow when he stood up to speak : the voice of a man who could no longer be excited or surprised. Then my young friend spoke and as he came to the end of his talk, he mentioned my name. He was pleased, he said, to bring his British guest to their party. I saw the old man's eyes piercing my armour then, searching me as deep as my spine. Then came the awful moment in which I was asked to speak. I stood up and, through my friend's translation, I thanked them all for allowing me to be their guest. On the table before me was the secretary's ink bottle and my own mug of beer. I touched the ink bottle and said, 'My friends, I am pleased to come here and drink beer with you. Wars are made by clever men who sit over ink bottles with their pens.' Then I touched my beer mug. 'Peace is kept by good friends who sit over beer mugs with their pipes.' I lifted my mug, drank to them and sat down. As I clutched my beer mug, to hide my nervousness, I saw the old man's eyes, grown more kindly, but still examining me. At the end, he gathered a number of the older men about him. They whispered for a few minutes and then the veteran thumped the table with his beer mug and asked for silence. They wished, he said, that I should become an honorary

member of their old soldiers' association. I thanked them, frankly with tears in my eyes, for the compliment had not been easily won. Then the fine old man said something which was remarkable when one remembers that this tiny village was tucked away from the world in the forests of Ober-Hessen. 'When you go back to England,' he said, 'please carry the good wishes of the soldiers of X—to your King. We know that he is a good man with a good character.'

The other scene which I like to recall is one of Coburg in 1932. By this time my life of Prince Albert had been published and, after three summers in Thuringia, I knew the little duchy as well as any of the counties in England. I had found the story of Coburg's past in the archives. In the summer that followed, I came to know the new life which had grown up in the wake of the revolution. The streets of the town through which Queen Victoria had driven as a young bride—streets lined by school-girls, carrying nosegays in celebration of her coming, were now given over to the waving of the flags of the Nazis. But the charm of antiquity had not faded from the beautiful little town and the habits and talk of the Coburgers still bore graceful Victorian touches which showed that the great days were not forgotten. A descendant of Prince Albert's tutor, Flörschütz, still lived in the house which the Princes gave him when he was old, and upon his walls and tables there were a hundred souvenirs of the 'thirties and 'forties. I sat in the house one evening with

the old man. He was gravely proud of his ancestor. It was among his possessions that I found the first letter which Queen Victoria wrote to Prince Albert, when she was still a child.

Officials of the new Government do not resent the geraniums about the foot of the statue of Prince Albert in the market place, nor the princely portraits which hang in the galleries, nor the carved stone arms which embellish the gateways of the castles. The revolutionaries expelled the princes, but they did not destroy the symbols of their culture or the memorials of their history. In Germany the rioters were not violent in the way of the Spanish insurgents who mutilated the public statues, like destructive children, finding their delight in smashing every carved stone crown they could find. Coburg has not been damaged in this way. The Prince Consort's collections of butterflies and autographs and the early wood carvings which he gathered together when he was a boy, are still in the castle. The guide still points to the high room in Schloss Ehrenberg in which Prince Albert learned his first words of English, and the children of the school still enjoy the bounty which was given them by Queen Victoria as a thank-offering, when Prince Albert escaped death in an accident with his horses.

It is wonderful, as one walks over the battlements of the castle, to recall the power that went out to the world from this little town. In Napoleon's time, Coburg was ravaged and left poor. It was no more than a little state of one hundred thousand

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people, ruled by a family with illustrious lineage but not even described as *royal*. Upon the wings of one ambitious man, Prince Leopold, afterwards King of the Belgians, the family grew in power and drew half the courts of Europe into its net. Kings and Princes came here to rest from their anxieties and the great affairs of the world were nursed in the castles. Coburg gave Princess Charlotte her husband and then Belgium her first King. It gave the last Duke of Kent his bride and it gave Queen Victoria her consort. It gave Portugal a Prince Consort, Mexico its ill-fated Empress, and Bulgaria its kings. These were the dramas of a century before. In 1932, Coburg made one more graceful gesture when it gave Sweden a bride for Prince Gustav Adolf, son of the Crown Prince and, through him, heir to the Swedish throne. For three days in October, the little town forgot its republican notions to celebrate a royal wedding. More than fifty princes and princesses gathered in Coburg, coming, some from countries in which thrones are still secure, and some out of exile. For three days, the old glory of the town was re-awakened and the red curtains of republicanism were swung back, to reveal the sight of old uniforms, heavy with orders and gilt, and a fairy story of the marriage of a prince and princess which did not lose its prettiness because of the iconoclasm of a changed and hardened world. Prince Albert's beloved Coburg blossomed again, and as I sat in the church, waiting for the grand procession to come, I could not help musing on the old scenes which I had come

to know so well : the scene of Prince Albert's christening in the little white and silver room at Rosenau, the wedding festivities of his unhappy mother and, a little time afterwards, the soldierly figure of the Duke of Kent, arriving in Coburg to claim his bride.

There was one figure in the wedding procession, a bent, portly old man, who did not seem to belong to the fairy tale. King Ferdinand of Bulgaria, whose small palace is in the town of Coburg, was one of the company. Almost fifty years had passed since the angry day on which Queen Victoria first learned that he aspired to the throne of Bulgaria. 'It is important that it should be known,' she wrote, 'that I and my family have nothing to do with the absurd pretensions of this foolish young cousin of mine.' She thought him 'totally unfit—delicate, eccentric and effeminate.' The scheme 'should be stopped at once.' Neither ambition for her relatives nor sentiment ever undermined her sagacity in a time of real crisis and it was interesting, in the midst of the brilliance of the marriage, to see this old, exiled sovereign, in whom scholarship and erudition were dangerous qualities, for they were not mounted upon the character of which kings are made. A celebrated portrait painter once told me that King Ferdinand was 'the most brilliant' prince he had ever painted. Tucked away in Coburg, he pursues his studies, writing treatises which stir the respect of scholars, and stirring a sad sort of pity among those who talk with him. I could not help allowing my mind to pass over the strange story of his life and thinking of what

wisdom there was in the Queen's judgment. She was seldom wrong in summing up a man and if she failed intellectually to appreciate her 'eccentric' nephew as a scholar, she was certainly wise enough to know that his gifts were not those of a king.

For only three days Coburg was in its gala dress. There were processions and fireworks, and opera at night. When the gaiety ended, Coburg settled down to its mundane life again. The royal banners were put away and the red flags, with the black swastikas, hung from the flag poles once more. A wedding in which fifty royal persons walked in procession would not be strange in England, but in Republican Germany, it was an incongruous survival from the past : certainly a pleasant survival for those who cared to remember that this was not the first time that Coburg had sent out one of its princesses to be, perhaps, the mother of a king.

One evening, when the wedding festivities were over, I walked out from Coburg to Rosenau. The wedding celebrations had not embraced the little castle. It was closed, and the gardens were deserted as night was falling. A mile or less from the tall, gothic turrets, there is a beer garden to which the peasants come in the evening, with their pipes, their knitting and their gossip. They do not come very often now, for in hard times even beer is a luxury to them. On most summer evenings, a violinist plays from the dais beside the lake. Many times I have sat listening to him as he has poured his sweet, sentimental tunes over the heads of his listeners :

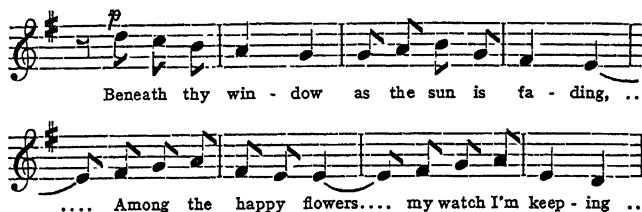


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making the woods and the garden quite romantic for those who are not cold and cynical and too exalted to appreciate Tschaikowsky and Mascagni. On this last evening after the wedding, the violinist played to an empty garden. The old iron chairs were tilted against the deserted tables and the one, forlorn little waiter leaned against the door post, looking as if the end of his world had come. The violin sobbed the final notes of its song and then the violinist let the bow fall to his side. He sighed, for he was tired of playing to the moon. I was standing beyond the horizon of the light which came from the beer garden and he could not see me. I clapped loudly. There were two young English boys with me and they already thought me crazy, so they did not mind when I went up to the man and asked him to play for us alone. They thought it unnecessary when I ordered a bottle of wine and asked him to share it with us. The poor little man smiled once more. He had been playing all the evening, he said, and only a brat of a boy had paused for a moment to listen to him. It was so disconsolate for an artist to play to empty chairs and bare tables. I knew from his music that he was a sentimental fellow so I suggested that he should walk along the shore of the lake with his violin and play to us across the water. My young Englanders thought me unpleasantly crazy now and one whispered, 'Won't he think it a little odd?' My violinist did not think it a little odd. His face became radiant and he set off along the water's edge,

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until he was lost among the trees and shadows. We waited for a minute and then, sweet and resonant because they travelled over the water, the notes of *O Sole Mio* came to us. . . .



No violin ever sang and sobbed and sang again as this one did. I had given the violinist all he asked, for he was a good German. He had a lake, with swans on it, lighted by a slim moon. He had a castle behind him, piercing the lower clouds with its gothic turrets. He had, at last, an audience, and he played and played, ending with *The Rosary*, which some German musicians suppose to be the only piece of music ever composed in England. My violinist came back from his bower on the lake shore and we drank one more bottle of wine, in memory of Prince Albert, who had played at soldiers in the garden and upon the shores of the lake, when he was a child.

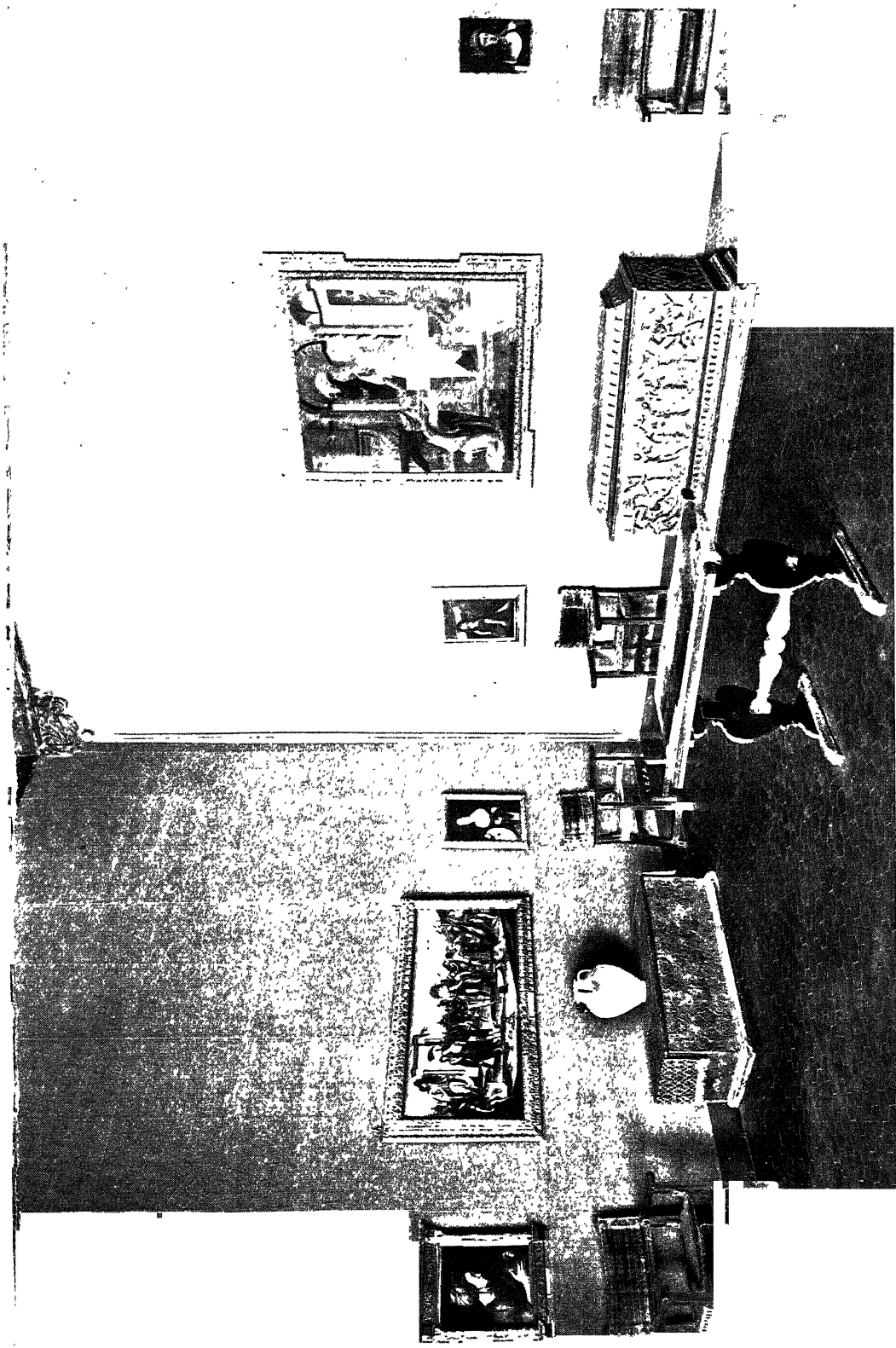
Chapter Ten

IN February of 1932, I was in Rome, writing the Italian chapters of my biography of the late Lord Melchett. During the morning of the first day, I drove through the streets for the first time in a slow, open carriage, with all the delight you may imagine. When I was a little boy in New Zealand, I had been told that Rome was not built in a day and this saw had led me to expect wonders. I was not disappointed. I went there with a friend who had known the city since the days of his childhood. He had lived in a house at the top of the Spanish Steps—the palazzo which Zuccaro had built with the money he took back to Rome after painting Elizabeth and her court in England. D'Annunzio and Marconi had been visitors to my friend's house and when he was a boy he had known Duse and Siegfried Wagner. He was old enough to be wise and young enough to be able to play. We understood each other when we stood in silence before Michael Angelo's *Moses* and we saw eye to eye when we laughed at some nonsense : when we walked among the fallen columns of the Forum or picked wild violets in the fields about Hadrian's Villa. In my friend, knowledge and laughter were rightly mixed and every sight and foolish joke was more lovely for being shared with him. He was my guide for this first wonderful stay in Rome. In the morning of the

third day, we went to the Sistine Chapel. A lesson of my childhood was awakened for me by the sight of Michael Angelo's ceiling. I remembered that when I was a boy, my grandmother possessed a little book of pictures of Rome. She first showed me the ceiling panel in which God gives the breath of life to Adam. I remembered the calm hand of God, strong and gentle, extended towards Adam. I remembered also the angry God of the *Day of Judgment* with his clenched hand. My grandmother had tried to tell me that I should always imagine God as I saw him first—his hand relaxed and tender—not as a threatening fist, closed against pity.

From the Sistine Chapel, I went to the Palazzo Venezia, in which Signor Mussolini has his offices. Before the war the Palazzo was the Austrian Embassy. I believe that Fräulein Krupp first met her husband there, at luncheon. As a young man, he was in the German Embassy. Now he tramps through the labyrinthine works of Krupp in Essen, the keeper of a cemetery of machines.

The Palazzo Venezia is set in a busy part of Rome. Its doors are guarded by Fascist soldiers marching and watching, anxious lest they should not seem sufficiently pugnacious. The passages and stairs of the Palazzo bristled with defences and even with a fixed appointment I was not excused. My passport was suspected and my signature was demanded. At last, I was handed over to a gilded official who spoke to me kindly. He led me through a succession



of rooms into which Signor Mussolini had gathered some of the most beautiful pictures and furniture in Rome. The walls were hung with renaissance velvet and in one room I saw the Fillipo Lippi picture which was shown in London in 1930. It had belonged to Ludwig Mond, father of Lord Melchett, and it was therefore especially interesting to me as I passed. I was led into a great chamber in which there was no furniture except innumerable chairs covered with cerise leather, placed against the walls. I crossed the room, fighting a wish to creep on my tip-toes. I walked with the fear of a man who knows he is about to sneeze in a drawing-room, during a pianissimo violin solo. At the far end of the room there were double doors and I knew that when they were opened, Signor Mussolini would be sitting in the room on the other side. The two big doors were thrown wide. I was on the threshold of another colossal room and at the far end, almost lost in the distance, was a figure sitting at a table. The doors closed behind me and I was alone with Signor Mussolini. Crossing the great empty room was not easy. The most irate insurrector would be intimidated by the distance, the shining floor and by the figure of Signor Mussolini at his desk. One might imagine a wild fellow bursting into the room, wishing to begin a revolution, but I am sure that when he arrived before *il Duce*, he would be so intimidated that he would be content with no more than a chair. For a moment I was taken aback. I remembered the apocryphal

story of the Shah of Persia visiting Queen Victoria at Windsor. It is said that when the doors were opened for him, he found himself faced by a green carpet, flecked with a pattern of pink roses : that he was obliged to hop towards the Queen and her throne from rose to rose, because his religion forbade him from stepping on anything green in colour. I did not hop. I dared to walk, gingerly, over the glistening floor. At any moment one might slide and finish up at *il Duce's* feet on one's behind. It was all a brilliant piece of production. There were no objects upon which to focus one's eyes. Fortunately I had been in the room once before, when I went to the Palazzo to see the pictures. I remembered the pattern of the mosaic and could walk with assumed ease, looking to right and left and not staring at my host until the end of the dreadful journey.

I still remembered the Fascist leader of the newspaper photographs with his indignant fist and blazing eyes. For a moment Signor Mussolini blazed and stiffened to pattern, but he soon became a charming, smiling host and my nervousness left me. We spoke in English. Signor Mussolini gave me my first sensation of having met a great man. He transcended such words as *personality*, *force* and *charm*. His eyes made any meanness in one wither up. I think a liar would feel sick in his belly if Mussolini looked at him for very long. The examination of his eyes is at first cold and ruthless. Like Cuesta, he 'looked into the last little place of you,

where you keep your courage.' One feels that he would have moved Vesuvius if it had stood in his way. My fear soon passed, for his big, severe face softened into a smile. At one moment in the conversation, when I dared to make a little joke, he moved his head and looked no more than fifteen years of age. His eyes were laughing then.

The purpose of my visit was to talk to Signor Mussolini of Lord Melchett. Writing the biography of this brilliant, sad man was a great experience and lesson for me. Neither his talents, his kindness nor his riches had brought him contentment. Even the men who admitted that he was a great financier and a philosopher, wavered when they spoke of his personality. It seems that his excursions into science, finance, politics and art were all to leave him friendless. Perhaps it was that he had too many irons in the fire for any one of them to become white hot. Men were not eager to speak kindly of him.

One cannot read the most intimate letters a man has written without finding glimpses of the truth. Tact and restraint and fear cannot guard every phrase, and here and there, the knight must give us a glimpse of himself through the chinks of his armour. As I worked on the manuscript, I came to be more and more fond of Lord Melchett's character and in the later chapters I was excited by my wish to prove him to be greater than most people supposed. It was not until almost the end of his life that he formed his true ambition : it was when

he stood on the slopes above the Sea of Galilee and said of the Jews, 'These are my people. This is my electorate. These are my people.' The cynic and atheist had talked for the first time of a 'holy and deep feeling' and he had declared, 'I do not consider myself as an Englishman. I am a Palestinian . . . my heart is in Eretz-Israel.' I did not wish to throw new limelight upon Lord Melchett's achievements. They were already admitted and known. But I wished my book to stir affection for him (for he was a lonely, haunted man and in need of affection) as well as to celebrate him as a politician and as a financier. I was, I suppose, searching for a key to the greatness of his spirit in which I came to believe. I think Signor Mussolini gave me the proof of this greatness, if he did not give me the key. Without any apparent interests in common, without the comfort of speaking the same language or of sharing the same scheme for living, Lord Melchett had commanded Signor Mussolini's respect. 'He was a great man' he said to me, twice. 'Alfred Mond was a *great* man.' And then he touched on the reason for his respect. 'He had the gifts of a prophet, that is why he was great. Six years ago Lord Melchett sat in this room and prophesied every political change which has come to England, right up to the present sweeping victory of the National Government.'

As I left Signor Mussolini's room, my eye alighted upon a sight which pleased me. On the map stand, which was the only piece of furniture, excepting the

desk and chairs, there was an atlas, opened to a map of New Zealand.

In February of 1933 I was again in Rome and one afternoon I went to the Academia, to see the Marchese Marconi. I had met him several times in London but never in the country which gives him his natural background. The Marchese Marconi thinks and talks and lives in English with as much ease as in his own language. He took me over the main rooms of the Academia, and then we drove through the Borghesi Gardens. He was tired after a long day and I did not wish to intrude too long. But I touched a spark which made him sit up and talk for half an hour. I told him that I had been received by Signor Mussolini last time I was in Rome. 'No other man has his freshness of thought and ideas,' he said. 'I meet him in Council and we never have a problem to which he does not bring some new and helpful thought.' He went on with stories of Mussolini's loyalty to his friends, his care for detail, his kindness and his energy. One day there was a big dinner party in Rome and the Marchese Marconi was among the guests. His place at table was not as exalted as it might have been. Signor Mussolini was at the head of the table and the purpose of the dinner was important and the guests were numerous and distinguished. Signor Mussolini observed the error and next day he gave the Marchese his apologies. It was thrilling to listen to such a spontaneous and affectionate tribute as Marconi made. He was the most celebrated of all Italians, in a time when

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Signor Mussolini had not been heard of beyond his own community. He has proved his own nobleness of motive and mind by being willing to follow a leader who has inspired him, with a loyalty which is rather boyish, for he talks of Mussolini as an English youngster might speak of Nelson or of Drake.

I returned to England from Italy, to continue the writing of my life of Lord Melchett and to live in a changed world : the world of politicians and financiers. For five years, I had basked among the letters of Palmerston, Disraeli and Gladstone, enjoying in my work the sensation of living in the golden age when statesmen moulded public opinion and did not merely hold the looking-glass up to its crotchets and fancies. The perspective of time obliterates little men and humbugs, but it also increases the stature of the giants. At first, when I left the company of Palmerston, Disraeli and Gladstone, to talk with the living men who were striving after the same kind of greatness, I was drugged by my own cynicism and disinclined to believe that my century produced men as courageous as the great Victorians. I was wrong, and if I failed to find the glamour with which time endows the great, I found some men in whom the talent for leadership still seemed to thrive.

When a New Zealander makes his home in Britain, he cannot be asked to appreciate the ardour of its political partisans. Englishmen become fierce over causes which are strange to him and it is not easy for him to find his way along so many tracks which all seem to lead to the same goal in the end : it is not

easy for him to understand why so many men who boast the same ideals, must scratch and abuse and strike pompous attitudes, to achieve them. When I was a boy in New Zealand, we lived in the security of a Conservative Government for fourteen years. Our Prime Minister was a farmer whom we called Honest Bill Massey. This homely name described him. He was not disturbed by talent nor undermined by vanity. It was said that he was a man who kept the ten commandments. We seemed to ask no more than this of our leader, and for many years we were so fortunate as to enjoy government without politics. Four years ago, I knew little of politics or politicians and I had never voted, because I had roved too much to belong to any one electorate.

When young, one is doubly aware of the quality of leadership in older people. When we are floundering in the uncertainty of our twenties, allowing our faith to move from figure to figure, as a searchlight at sea moves its rays over space seeking in the dark, we are anxious to find a leader to whom we may give our allegiance. The qualities we demand in him cannot be defined very simply. We wish to believe in somebody without being guided merely by our reason : like all great faiths, our faith must be beyond intellectual definition. We must serve the cause our leader acclaims, because we love the leader himself and follow him blindly. This kind of fidelity and hero-worship is something which overflows from our cup, something apart from the daily grind of reasoning and discipline. Lord Melchett

attempted to define this quality when he described his devotion to Mr. Lloyd George. 'One adores Lloyd George,' he said. 'One follows him in the same way as one follows a woman one loves. Not in the least blind to her faults, but forgiving everything.'

Some twist in my nature has always incited me to champion lost causes. Success and power have never seemed lovely or desirable when I have come near to them. I would rather have died with Charles the First than have lived for Cromwell, although I believe, in my heart of hearts, that Cromwell was right. So it is not for their being illustrious or successful that I choose my heroes. If I had ambition and wished to find a leader from the men I met during these years, the names of only three come to my mind. Signor Mussolini, Mr. Lloyd George and Sir William Jowitt. My devotion hangs by slim threads for I met Signor Mussolini twice in Rome, Mr. Lloyd George once in his home at Churt, and Sir William Jowitt once at a dinner party.

One cold February day, I motored over to Churt to see Mr. Lloyd George. I wished him to talk to me of the late Lord Melchett and the interview was not to be easy, for they had quarrelled when Lord Melchett went over to the Conservative party in 1926. Their words at the time had been bitter. Mr. Lloyd George had turned to the Acts of the Apostles to find his barb. He had recalled Judas who 'by transgression fell' and he had said that,

'like another notorious member of his race, Alfred Mond had gone to his own place.' Mond in reply had said that the hindrance to Mr. Lloyd George's greatness was that he could not 'bear a man who has the instincts and code of a gentleman near him for long. It gives him an inferiority complex.' The last gossamer veils of politeness had been rent at their farewell.

I wished Mr. Lloyd George to help me but my mission was not made easy by the bitter words with which his friendship with Lord Melchett had come to an end. Mr. Lloyd George came in from the garden. He was on the defensive at first. I felt that the interview was one in a long line of dull duties and that I had been forced upon him. Then I used a simple trick of the interviewer. I said, 'What has surprised and interested me is that in his most private letters Lord Melchett never said one unkind thing about you. The admiration endured after the quarrel to the end.' Mr. Lloyd George responded. He smiled and allowed his melodious voice to become more melodious still. I wrote as he talked, but every time I looked up, I was entranced by his eyes. I found it impossible not to stare, as if through some kind of hypnosis—the same power which exalts Mussolini—the intangible power which made Nijinsky in a moment of trance hold the congregation of peasants in a Swiss Church spell-bound for an hour, as he stood before the altar, looking at them without moving a hand. In the middle ages it was called the evil eye. Now

we know it to be the eye which makes Prime Ministers. Mr. Lloyd George was gracious, helpful and candid. He rose above the memory of his quarrel and analysed Lord Melchett's character for me, ending with one splendid tribute. 'He was above rancour,' he said. Mr. Lloyd George's beautiful voice rose and fell, like the deepest notes of a 'cello. The interview ended with his most gracious gesture. I said as I stood up to go, 'I wish, sir, you would suggest a book in which I could find the history of the 1906 elections, written from the Liberal point of view.'

'Are you in a hurry?' he asked.

I answered, 'No.'

'Then sit down and I shall give it to you.'

Then poured out the pages which I was able to incorporate into my book. I realised afterwards one of the reasons for Mr. Lloyd George's power. I found that when I was writing the chapters describing the Liberal fall and the quarrel between Mr. Lloyd George and Lord Melchett, I had to struggle against my wish to excuse Lloyd George instead of his political enemy who was the subject of my book. He draws one to his heels by magic.

It was bewildering to me as I drove away from Churt, to realise that this amazing man was tucked away on his farm, mistrusted, the butt of the cartoonist and the rhymster. The Crown Prince of Germany once said in the hour of his humiliation, 'History knows no gratitude.' It seems true of Mr. Lloyd George. It is uncanny to compare him, as he was in 1916, with the fallen figure which

Punch derided in its cartoon, 'And he was once Prime Minister.'

I came away from Churt, glowing with devotion. I have no doubt that now, as Mr. Lloyd George is planning his return to the arena, we might speak of him as Queen Victoria spoke of Gladstone's last, dangerous experiment, in the summer of 1892 : of 'the shaking hand of an old, wild and incomprehensible man. . . .' I have little doubt that Mr. Baldwin is the man in whose hands our safety lies. But I know also that Mr. Lloyd George would need only to whistle to have me at his heels, trusting him blindly.

I have said that Sir William Jowitt was another Englishman who has made me feel that he has the qualities of a great leader. Like Mr. Winston Churchill and Lord Melchett, Sir William once changed his political party : he forsook Liberalism to become Attorney-General in the Labour government. Britons do not trust a man who changes his political label and they are never kind enough to allow that in doing so, he may be following the dictates of his conscience. If Sir William had remained in the Liberal half-light, inactive and powerless, he would have been applauded as a loyal man. That he served the country well as Attorney-General does not matter. England does not forgive him for being loyal to himself rather than to his party. I have little tangible reason for my devotion to Sir William Jowitt. It was only that during two brief hours when I heard him talking, I felt the first glow

of hero-worship. We were standing in the drawing-room of a house in which we had been guests at dinner. As so often happens, the loudest voice was that of the only bore in the party. Sir William was standing before the fireplace and the bore, a whitish, plump man, who wore his decorations, although the dinner was small and private, was accusing Sir William of not taking his place in the fight of to-day. His arguments were silly. He was an insensitive, stupid man, full of prejudices and barren of ideas. Sir William did not answer him. The tedious numbskull shook his white finger in Sir William's face. At last, he was answered. Sure of his argument and of his talent for presenting it, Sir William punished his man. They were not cuts that seared the flesh : rather were they subtle potions which would work slowly when the fool was alone. Sir William seemed to grow taller. Globules of sweat were on his forehead and his voice was stinging cold. He did not fall into the error of abuse, which might have been excused, for the man had been clumsy and rude. I was dizzy with pleasure over Sir William's arguments : clear thinking, expressed in words as necessary and inevitable as the words of a psalm. Without the material of his answer, I cannot relay my pleasure to you. But I do know that I found myself saying, ' There is a man I could follow,' and I do know that as we left the house, I ran at his heels and pretended that his way home was my way also, so that I could continue to hear him talk.

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When I recall the other celebrated men whom I met during the year in which I was working on Lord Melchett's biography, I feel that most of them were eminent according to their courage rather than their astuteness, their brains or their capacity for work. Some of them seem to be held back by fear ; fear that their dignity was not secure, because they did not believe in it themselves, and by the more poisonous fear that if they showed themselves to be human, they might be judged as being irresolute. While writing the book, I met two kinds of business men. There was the older generation, left over from the days of Ludwig Mond, when the industrialist, the chemist and the managing director were one man. There was also the new kind of business man who promotes and directs industries without the smells of the works in his nostrils. To a humble author, for whom money must always be a fluid thing and never a possession, the mentality of financiers is strange and their talk is double Dutch. Twice in my life I have made investments. I once bought one hundred shares in a gold mine. I forgot the name of the man who held them for me and I forgot the name of the mine. I learned little and lost everything from my venture. I made one more, when I was writing the history of Ludwig Mond's discovery of the nickel process. He had happened on it by accident and I thought the story so romantic that I wished to possess some shares in a nickel company. I bought some and next day I sailed for Palestine. When I returned, my shares had leapt up more than

one hundred per cent. I sold them, to the delight of my patient bank manager who guards my account, like a mother caring for her child, long after life is extinct. I never dabbled again. I was bewildered when I met the great men who talked in millions. It has always seemed fantastic and unnecessary to me that any man who possesses a house and a thousand pounds a year should sit in an office and torture himself by trying to make ten thousand pounds. But I am willing to believe that they obey some ennobling motive which is beyond my understanding.

When I embarked among the Titans of finance, I found them to be much more gentle and simple than I had expected. Their vulnerable points were their sentimentality and their vanity. A simple fellow must know of these weaknesses and attack the great man accordingly. He must not try to *impress* him. He must not mention money. He must say to the great man, 'You are the only person who can help me.' At this, he is already smiling upon your scheme. You must then ask him for his advice. At this, he expands visibly and pours his advice upon you. I have been told by an author more corrupt than myself that you have only to mention his mother to a great business man whereupon he will burst into tears and sign anything. Fooling aside, what impressed me deeply when I met the company directors who had been Lord Melchett's friends, was their courage. Perhaps it was the wine of the old fashioned industrialist in a new glass. During this time, when I was gathering the facts

of Lord Melchett's story together, I met many leaders of industry and among them, Sir Harry McGowan. Lord Melchett and Sir Harry had created Imperial Chemical Industries together. Crossing the Atlantic on board the *Aquitania* they had planned the merging of assets valued at almost one hundred million pounds. The Companies they wished to control manufactured five thousand products and the stamp which they would be obliged to buy when the agreement was presented at Somerset House, was to cost one million pounds. When they arrived in London they chose the land for their offices. The building was to be one hundred and twenty feet high, embracing six million cubic feet, with seven hundred rooms and two and a half miles of corridors. For ten days, the architect who was planning the building did not go to bed. At five o'clock one afternoon the directors of the new colossus passed the plans and three hours afterwards, as London was darkening, the steam excavators began their work. The courage of the two men who dared this enterprise was tremendous.

Lord Melchett had said of Sir Harry McGowan when they first met, 'He has the head of a Roman Emperor, powerful and friendly.' With this phrase ringing as a promise in my memory, I went off to meet him in his own house. I was immediately aware of the head of the Roman Emperor for the power was apparent in a second. But the friendliness came slowly. It was when I touched him on the point of his self esteem that I received the full flood of his

kindliness. I told him that Lord Melchett had once written of him as a man 'with the head of a Roman Emperor, powerful and friendly.' He seemed to become half conscious of the Forum spreading at his feet. I bathed in the sureness of his ideas, the quick leaping to conclusions and the courage with which he lashed out when he felt the will to do so.

No two men could be as different as Sir Harry McGowan and his colleague, Lord Reading. Sir Harry McGowan is spontaneous and active, with no pretensions to the æsthetic or the sublime. Lord Reading knows men's hearts to the core. With Sir Harry McGowan, one feels like a little boat at sea, liable to be destroyed or saved, according to his will. With Lord Reading, one feels like a specimen, examined patiently under a microscope. To me, one of the fascinations of my first, nodding acquaintance with industry was in seeing men so vastly different, assembling their talents in one great company. Once he decided to speak frankly to me, Sir Harry McGowan was unselfish with information but with Lord Reading the story was different. I lunched with him alone, to talk of Lord Melchett. Lord Reading's voice was never raised : it flowed on, quiet with benevolence and wisdom. It never became uncontrolled. When I asked a question to which he did not wish to give me an answer, I was gently drawn aside into the way of general conversation. He talked of India, of pictures and of gardens, but I realised when luncheon was ended, that I had not been told one of the facts for which I was

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searching. My points had been evaded with the skill of a surgeon cutting near to the heart. There was no blood let: no wound. I left as I came, without answers to my questions, but I had been allowed to meet a man who brought the glow of eighteenth century chivalry into the Director's luncheon room of a great combine, a room in which millions were spoken of as casually as I talk of pence. We had talked of travel and orange-growing, Goethe and the Mosque of Omar, and if the purpose of my intrusion was frustrated and lost, I was enchanted and did not mind.

Chapter Eleven

IN the winter of 1933 I went to live in Trans Jordan as the guest of the Amir Abdullah, who is a brother of the late King Feisal. I feel that the story is not an interloper in this book, for the Amir was one of the most charming men I have ever known and he is at home in my story of older people who have been kind to me. Before I went to stay in his palace in Amman, I travelled farther south, to Petra and to Akaba. Our desert road passed through Amman and I saw the Amir and his palace for the first time, on the way.

We drove down from Jerusalem to Jericho, which is set in the Jordan Valley, near to the point where the river widens and runs into the Dead Sea. The way from Jerusalem to Jericho is through Bethany and past the inn of the Good Samaritan. It cuts down between the cruel, lifeless mountains of Judea to the shores of the Dead Sea, the deepest place in the earth's surface. The thin, dismal stream of the Jordan was stained with mud and the only beautiful and gay intruder on the river bank was one impudent oleander which blossomed incongruously among the empty husks of the apples of Sodom. From the tortured dry earth about the mouth of the Jordan, we rose again into fragrant country, where the pomegranates burned against the white walls of the Arab houses. At last we came to the stretch of

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cool, open land, where I was to enjoy my first Arab hospitality. The Amir Abdullah had found the rooms of his palace too sultry, so he had pitched his tents near to the indefinite desert road, to catch any stray breeze that blew over the sand. My friend led us up to the sentry, a tall, slim Yemenite who seemed to be carved out of coal. He came from the shores of the Red Sea and he had followed the Amir when his family was expelled from the throne in Mekka. We were ushered into a reception tent. Except for the chairs upon which we sat, the only furniture was a table, with a telephone and an ash tray upon it. The ash tray was a concession to European visitors, for the Amir abstains from both alcohol and tobacco. He came in and sat opposite us, after shaking hands. His own small hand moved now and then to accentuate a fine point of his story and his eyes bubbled over with good humour and laughter. At his heels came a servant in a scarlet head-dress. He brought us sweet tea without milk, already poured into small cups. Most of the conversation was in Arabic, but the last of the Amir's remarks was translated to me. I think that I have written of it somewhere else, but it bears repeating. He was talking of extravagance and he had said with a sigh that he had great sympathy for the careless spender. I added a dull line to the talk by saying, 'But the English make their money circular so that it can roll away easily.' 'Yes,' answered the Amir, 'but now you make it of paper and it simply flies away.'

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After three days of dusty, hot motoring, we came to Akaba, the northern inlet of the Red Sea, upon which Solomon is said to have anchored his ships. Here, within sight of the golden slopes of Sinai, we lived almost as Arabs for seven days. The bay of Akaba is celebrated for its fish and the way of catching them is as pleasant as the taste of eating them, after they have been cooked over a palm-wood fire. We slept in a shelter of laced fronds, with one side open to the sea. Behind were the Arab houses and a few supercilious, mangy camels, cooling themselves beneath the trees during the hot day. Beyond the village was a sandy valley which led to the guarding mountains of granite, streaked with malachite green. Before us was Mount Sinai, upon which God had walked.

When darkness came, eighteen slender Arabs gathered upon the sea shore before our shelter. Some carried huge old sabres. The others held torches of dried palm fronds. We entered the warm, dark water at the heels of the torch bearers and waded knee-deep over the smooth sand. First we came upon a shoal of minute fishes, a million ebony darts, lit by the flames. They dashed their little sharp bodies against our legs and they leapt out of the water, hitting our loins and our hands. We moved beyond them, along the beach where the trees hid the moon. Here we came to deeper water. The Arabs raised their torches and peered down into the liquid sapphire, revealing a thousand living things. Here the fishes were bigger and, mesmerised

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by the light of the torches, they hung motionless in the warm tide. With terrifying precision, the Arabs slashed the water with their blades and almost every time, the body of a fish turned over, cut in two. The baskets which were slung over the fishermen's shoulders were heavy when we came to the end of the beach. The last palm torch flame had died and the blackened frond had been thrown into the sea. We walked home by the light of a lantern while the Arabs, dark as the night which shrouded them, sang shrill, plaintive songs. We were tired enough to fall upon our beds, looking out from our palm shelter, towards the slowly fading vision of Sinai, lit by a superb, orange moon.

My first Arab meal was marred by a miserable incident. One night at Akaba, the chief merchant came down from the Arab village, followed by two servants who bore a heavy, enormous tray. It was four feet wide and on it were a hill of rice and a whole sheep. The forlorn, boiled head of the beast looked at us from the summit. We sat on the ground, surrounding the tray, and we ate the warm mess from our hands. The rice was light as gossamer and the meat was tender enough. The Arab and his son ate with us, digging deep into the rice and bringing out the most delicate pieces of meat between their fingers. These were handed to us. We smiled our thanks in silence and ate them. The most gracious compliment of all came when the Arab merchant handed me one of the sheep's eyes. I took it in my hand, a globular, warm and horrible

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thing to touch. He smiled as he withdrew his long, sinewy arm. I tried to smile too. I lifted my eyes towards the star-lit sky over Sinai and wondered if my chivalry could be stronger than my stomach. I put the eye into my mouth. For one awful second I was aware of the slithery shape and then I swallowed it in the manner of an amateur with his first oyster.

*The man had sure a palate covered o'er
With brass or steel, that on the rocky shore
First broke the oozy oyster's pearly coat,
And risked the living morsel down his throat.*

As the sheep's eye slipped away into darkness, I tried to awaken a smile of ecstasy upon my face, to please my host and to hide the agony of mind and spirit within. But I had smiled too much. The merchant grinned and nodded. Then he extended his fatal hand once more and searched in the dish for the second eye. I grinned and trembled. He found it, held it up between his thumb and forefinger and then gave it to me. I dexterously lowered the eye into the dish, pretending to take a little rice with it. I pushed the eye deep into the pottage with my index finger and lifted the rice to my mouth without it. The ruse was a success. But neither the wailing of the Arab singers nor the moonlit beauty of Akaba were enough to stir me from my gloom. I went to bed conscious of an eye searching into my soul, and I wondered as I lay back, listening to the rustle of the palm shelter, what would be the

thoughts of the Arab when he discovered a 'third' eye, embedded in the rice. The dish had been carried off, and the feast had continued in the distance, where the rabble pounced upon it, like chickens after scattered corn.

My next Arab meal was elegant and charming. In one village in which I stayed, there was a lusty marauder who was credited with fourteen scalps. Border raiding and guerilla warfare had toughened his body to iron ; but even the sight of fourteen dead men had not hardened his heart. When we went to dine with him, he was the most gracious and sentimental host I have ever known. We were to eat with him early. After a hot day in the desert, I languished in a bath which gave a macabre note to the dressing hour. The bath was an old stone sarcophagus which had been dug up out of the sand. The bones of the dead man had been scattered in the desert and now, with a German bath-heater at one end and a soap tray at the other, it made a worthy tub. Lying back in another man's coffin, with a sponge in one hand, is likely to tickle the imagination and send it off into strange places. As I turned in the soapy water my identity became confused with that of the true tenant and I was haunted by my old childhood fear of being buried alive. What kind of man was he whose place I had usurped ! Prince or lowly fellow—black from the south, or some sallow traveller from the shores of the Levant ! I like to think that he died splendidly from a phial of poison bought in the bazaar of Damascus, or with a shining

knife, quivering in his side. It would be dull to bath in the coffin of a merely respectable old Arab gentleman who had died in bed.

I had been to drink coffee in the bazaar in the afternoon on the way back from the desert. By this time I had many friends to nod to in the little, dim shops. This Arab had sold me a packet of cigarettes from Damascus : that one had sold me a towel. This one had opened his new shop, for cigarettes, sugar sweets, nuts and slippers only two days ago and I had presented him with a charm made of turquoise blue beads to guard him from wicked debtors. The counters were a jumble of amusing uselessness : lamps and soap and sherbert, dates and shoes, fly whisks and bath robes, all in a dusty muddle.

The ceremony of drinking coffee with the shopkeeper was precise and pleasant. The owner usually sits behind his desk. As he was especially polite, this one gave the choice place to his honoured guest, behind the spike file and the money box. The shop was small, so small that one's feet dangled into the street, where the village youngsters lounged and stared and brushed flies out of their inflamed eyes. The shopkeeper took down a jar of violently coloured sweets, pink and green, and these were placed between the guests. Then he took a handful of salted nuts from a sack and spread them upon a sheet of paper. He was a man in his thirties, tall, good-looking, with a shy smile. After ten minutes, his docile, slim son appeared with a brass coffee pot in one hand and a nest of coffee cups without

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handles in the other. He poured a small quantity of coffee into a cup and this was handed to me, after he had clicked the lip of the pot against the edge of the cup. The coffee was bitter. (I came to like it more and more each time I drank it, and our own black coffee or the sweet Turkish coffee seemed dull afterwards). I drank my coffee and handed the cup back to the boy. It was half filled again and I drank once more. Then I shook the empty cup as a sign that I had finished. To accept more than three is not polite and to cross one's legs while sitting is poor manners, since this position exposes the soles of one's shoes to one's host. When I had finished, the host drank a cup of coffee alone. Sometimes the servant or the son leaves his shoes at the door when he enters the presence of the guest.

The same compliment was paid to us at dinner in the evening. The laughing assassin would not dream of eating until we had finished. We set out for the Arab quarter about seven o'clock. Interminable winding streets, banked by solemn white houses, led to the home of the sheik. He was waiting at the door, with his two sons who were mild boys, but dandies in their way, with European coats, pink ties and handkerchiefs edged with lace. We went into a cool, white courtyard, formed by three buildings joined corner to corner. From one came the parrot screeching of women at their cooking. On the other side was the dining-room, yawning open and illuminated by a fierce white light. On the third side was the living room towards which we

walked. The floor was covered by gay rugs and on the walls were moralising texts in Arabic. We sat in a straight line, as if in a tram, and we began the evening by drinking sweet tea. Then an especial honour was introduced. The wife and daughters of the host were brought in. He was a Christian and the staunch laws of the harem were not observed in his house. Under the régime of Mustafa Kemal, the veil and the secrecy of the harem are dying in Constantinople, but the Arabs in the Arab countries cling to the laws of the Prophet and in the meanest houses—even in the tents of the Bedouins—the corner possessed by the women is taboo. There is a story told of a certain British Governor's wife in the East who was allowed to visit the women of the harem. She had just arrived from England and she went upon her first visit, accompanied by an equally English A.D.C., fresh from his regiment at Aldershot. He waited in another room while Her Excellency went into the harem. Impatience or curiosity bade him seek beyond the dull waiting-room, and, disaster of disasters, he opened the wrong door and found himself in the harem. There were shrieks of horror from the unveiled women, but the oldest of the wives calmed them. 'You are not defiled,' she said. 'He is but the eunuch of Her English Excellency.' The young Briton went away forlorn, but honour was saved in the harem and all was well.

These prim restrictions were not kept up in the house of the sheik who was our host. His wife was

an Armenian and therefore allowed to come to see us. We shook her gnarled hand and congratulated her upon the savoury smells which floated to us from her kitchen. Then we walked across the courtyard to the dining-room.

The twelve courses were already upon the table. We dipped into whichever dish we chose, whenever we chose, returning every few minutes to our bowls of sour milk. The flavour of *leben* improved upon acquaintance. Our host would not sit with us. His humility and our exalted state made this impossible, he said. So he fluttered about behind us, spurring us on to greed. We threw ourselves over the feast whole-heartedly. There were eggs upon spinach and potatoes cooked in dark gravy. These were especially good. They had been half cooked first and then stewed in juice from a gazelle. In another dish were balls of finely chopped meat, baked with a faint suggestion of garlic. It was truly faint. The next dish which I fell upon was of rice, light as the rice which we ate at Akaba, with balls of meat, flavoured with baked nuts and wrapped up in palm leaves.

The mutton was especially tender and it fell away from the bones in succulent tit-bits. The Arabs guard their secret for cooking meat, if there is a secret. I seldom ate tender meat in European houses in the East, even when the cook was an Arab. The Arabs kill and eat their sheep on the same day because of the menace of sun and heat. In this quick journey from the fold to the pot they retain

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the muscles they have made in their youth, while searching for food on the mangy hills. In an Arab house or beneath a dirty, sagging, bedouin tent, the sheep is as tender and sweet as sucking pig. An old iron cauldron and a slow fire work some miracle upon the once sturdy carcase which is impossible in a European kitchen with all its cookery books and modern gadgets.

The house in which I lived at Ma'an was big and white and it clung to the edge of the straggling Arab village. It was like a fortress behind the encircling walls. The dismal sand of the desert extended to the door-step and defied my friend's attempts to make a garden. A few spring onions and three or four spartan marigolds were all that grew in the crackled earth of the court-yard. My bedroom and balcony looked out over the sun-burned sand and at night the windows and doors were left wide open so that the aromatic air came into my room along with the light of the moon. At first, the silence at night was more agitating to my nerves than the noise of the day and when a pariah dog stabbed the quiet with his howl, I was glad of the break in the tension. The aggravation of the silence passed in a day or two, when I knew that the desert and the village were friendly. Then I slept under my snowy mosquito net, in peace.

The man who called me in the morning was an Arab, bristling with arms. His work was peaceful enough: tea-making, orange-squeezing and, at almost every hour of the day, bringing a brass pot

of bitter coffee to us. But the docile man dressed like a brigand, with cartridge belt, a dagger with a silver hilt and, under the fold of his skirt, a holster which made a bulge on his hip. He was not frightening for all his weapons. He left his shoes at the door as he walked into my room and he smiled like a roguish boy as I said ' Good-morning.' My energy and my health grew in a day and I was strong as a young oak. When the gentle bandit called me, I leapt from my bed and smelled the new day at the window. On one side were the tumbled houses shot down by Lawrence when he passed this way on his campaign, a conglomeration of roofless mud hovels and torn walls. When I had stretched my chest and filled my lungs with the new air, I turned back into the room and chose the gramophone records for my shaving music . . . usually Bach or Haydn. I took my bath in the sarcophagus. My good British breakfast of bacon and eggs was followed by a lazy morning on the balcony. Sometimes I made a severe attempt at beginning a book. The first page was seldom turned over. The air was too warm and soothing for the mental effort of reading. Groups of camels went past, donkeys brayed idiotically, and dirty brats ran out into the bazaar or squatted in the dust to play their games of marbles. With these signs the day began.

Later in the morning we would walk down the village street and nod to our new friends : the shoemaker on the left, the chair-maker on the right. As we passed the only coffee saloon in the town, we could

hear the clack-clack of the backgammon players, tossing their dice and moving the pieces over the board, quick as lightning. At the far end of the village there was a stream which watered the few precious gardens. Where the village street merged into the desert road, there was a bridge over which one could lean in idleness, watching the Arabs passing up and down the valley. Some leaned over the stream, rubbing their stained clothes between their soapy hands. There would be a tall black fellow from the south, carrying a brass kettle or counting amber beads on a string as a pretty substitute for our cigarette. Once I saw an old man leap from the ground and perform odd contortions within his one big, loose garment. He withdrew his arms from the sleeves and his head within the neck, so that he was completely hidden except for his thin, ebony legs and feet, like a prisoner within a sagging bell tent. In the end I learned the purpose of his search. He caught something, no doubt a sturdy flea, which had been attacking him. He killed the beast, with a flick of his finger nail, shouted a phrase of triumph and leaned down over his washing again. Our afternoons and evenings were quiet. The Arab mayor would come and play backgammon. One evening we tried the Arab trick of blackening our eyes with *kohl*. The Arabs use this vanity as medicine, believing it to be strengthening to the eyes. Chad, the servant, performed the ceremony, wetting a tooth-pick, sticking it into a heap of blue-black *kohl* and then drawing the tooth-pick

between our eyelids. In this way the inside of the lid directly touching the eye-ball was painted. The effect was sinister. One's eyes became big and shining and I looked the biggest rogue unhung. Now and again in the afternoon, the boy from the canteen came to me for an English lesson. I would have the dreadful problems of explaining to him why we use the same word for *post* office and telegraph *post*, and of excusing our habit of saying 'Look out!' when there is nothing out of which to look. He was a doleful boy, with the usual company of poor relatives with the usual curses of paralysis, blindness and bereavement. He would run away from his English lesson to play football on the sand waste next to the house.

At first it seemed that the little town and the lonely stream were the only relief in the monotony of sand. But there were occasional springs with verdure gathered about them. It was pleasant in the cool of the late afternoon to drive out over the desert : to come upon the fallen stones of an old well about which a few herbs grew richly, or walk upon swards of grass which shone like emeralds in their setting of dull sand. Five or six Bedouin tents would lie in the fold of a sand dune near by. Sometimes my friend went out in search of bustard and I remember one afternoon when we came upon a valley, richer than any other we had found. There were four little plantations beside the brave stream and a herd of black cattle with three Bedouins attending them. One came to us. He was perhaps twenty,

lithe and tall. His eyes were so big that they seemed ridiculous and his body was half covered by rags. He had never been within a house and he lived upon his own few sheep and the herbs which he dug up in the desert. His manners were most courtly. The Arabs never seem to move awkwardly or to have hard voices. He asked us if we could give him something for his 'shivering legs.' 'They quiver when I am cold,' he said. Also, his back was strained. Next day we went into the desert with a bottle of embrocation, but we could not find the boy with the shivering legs.

Another day we came upon a Crusader castle which was startling to see. After travelling over miles of cracked, grey desert, we entered a deep rift in the country before us. Far away, as a background, there was a stretch of black desert. It shone so that the blue of the sky seemed to be reflected upon its surface. As the car turned, we saw in the centre of the rift a small mountain, perhaps eight hundred feet high. It was a tidy cone of yellow earth and on top was Baldwin's Castle, crowning the hill as serenely as Coburg or Salzburg. The walls rose from the crest as if they had been drawn out of the earth by some miracle from the sky. In the valley, far down, there was a plantation of olive trees and emerald grass. The land was terraced like the vineyards on the banks of the Rhine. The contours of the plantation were marked in the two shades of green: the misty blue-green of the olive trees and the crude, hard green of the grass.

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We climbed the mountain to the castle along a slim road, and at the summit I came upon my Waterloo. My friend allowed us a few minutes in which to marvel over the scene from the battlements and then he took us towards a dark hole in the earth. It was the mouth of a tunnel dug by the Crusaders in their search for water and it penetrated the mountain to its base, on a level with the plantation on the lowland. My friend forced me down the broken, irregular steps, into the dark pit. We stumbled on with the aid of a flickering lamp, carried by a chatty and agile Arab who ran ahead of us and left us in the terrible and dangerous darkness. Down and down we scrambled, twisting and falling, grazing our elbows upon the black stone walls and gasping as the air became hot and sickly. We were promised a wonder when we came to the womb of the mountain: two pools in the rock, one boiling and one cold. My old horror of being buried alive attacked me. I fought against my panic and struggled on. In the end we came upon two dirty puddles of water with no beauty to excuse the pain which we had suffered. We returned to the summit of the hill, to drink coffee with the guard. Then, as the sun had fallen over the edge of the desert and the air was already cold, we descended the narrow road and went home.

The purpose of my visit to Trans Jordan was to write the biography of the late King Hussein, who fired the first shot, from the balcony of his palace in Mekka, in the revolt against the Turks. My book

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was never finished, but the drowsy weeks of living in the palace at Amman were not wasted. Late in March I went from the lonely white house in Ma'an, to the Amir's palace which stands upon a parched hill. It looks down over the town of Amman which is the capital of Trans Jordan.

When I arrived at the palace, Prince Talal, the Amir Abdullah's eldest son, was waiting to receive me. The room was big, with modern arm-chairs inlaid with mother-of-pearl and upholstered in Genoa velvet. Prince Talal was twenty-one, shy, with a quick and humorous smile. He spoke perfect English in a slow, soft voice. He was wearing a black cloak, embroidered with gold thread, a white kafiah and an immense gold dagger in his belt. A comforting, English-looking fire burned in the grate and in the centre of the room there was a splendid table, inlaid with mother-of-pearl and coloured woods, for chess and backgammon.

Prince Talal took me to my rooms which formed a self-contained flat, sitting-room with comfortable chairs, tables and rugs, bedroom and bathroom, and a wide passage which linked them together. In the daytime the bed was covered by a gay green silk quilt but later in the evening, this was taken away to reveal a usual bed, except that there were perhaps eight or ten pillows and cushions forming a valley in which I slept. I washed and changed and then Prince Talal came for me and led me across the fields behind the palace towards a big tent, pitched in the open. It was lined with yellow linen and there

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were many rugs upon the floor, some rich and beautiful. Here, beneath a blazing lamp, the Amir Abdullah received me. He was sitting upon a sheepskin mat and he leaned against a silver mounted camel saddle. He rose to greet me, touching my arm in a friendly way and smiling. His palace was to be my home, he told me, and he wished me to be happy and contented while I stayed with him.

The members of the Amir's Court hung back in the shadows until they were called forward for me to be introduced to them. Prince Talal acted as my friend, all through, for I was sadly handicapped by not being able to speak Arabic. A big square of stuff was brought in and laid upon the ground and here the food was spread. We sat down, myself at the left elbow of the Amir, with my legs crossed and the soles of my shoes hidden as best I could hide them. After a few minutes I felt that my legs would never move again. My muscles ached and my feet were in the agony of pins and needles. Stealthily I moved one leg, to change my position. The Amir saw me and gave me his camel saddle to lean against, in ease. On the other side of me was the Prime Minister. Then came the physician, a clever, friendly man who spoke English. Next to him was the interpreter, then the A.D.C., the legal adviser, Prince Naif, who is the Amir's second son and then, Prince Talal. Dinner was vast and good and the only beverage was *leben*, the sour milk which is drunk so much in the Balkans. We began

with small rissoles of meat, sweetened with nuts. These appeared, big as walnuts, on top of a mountain of rice. As we ate our dinner, the cook appeared every few minutes with the same small rissoles on a skewer which was four feet long. He walked among the company (we were sprawled upon the floor), and drew two or three of the balls off the skewer with his hand, dropping them on to each plate. In this way we went on eating a meal which was continually hot. Then came artichokes, stuffed with meat, and many more tempting dishes to which I was brave enough to say 'No.' For a fat and greedy man, good Arab food is a temptation and a delight. The meal ended with the bitter Arab coffee which I like and then Prince Talal moved around the circle towards me. The Prime Minister and the doctor withdrew to a corner and played chess.

Outside were the sound of the desert, the barking dogs, the gentle wind, which murmured as it sped up from the valley, and the rustle and clatter of the servants, taking away the ruins of our dinner. Prince Talal took a pack of cards from his servant. 'Perhaps,' he said, 'you would like to play a game with me.' I confessed that *rummy* was the only game I knew, so I taught him to play. He won the game and then he showed me an Arab game which he graciously allowed me to win. The Amir, who smiled every time I looked towards him, pondered over the game of chess, nodding and frowning according to the wisdom of the moves. An hour passed in this way. The servants had gone and

delicious peace settled upon us. About half-past nine o'clock, the Amir opened a book of pictures, mostly of modern steam ships. We looked at them for a little while and then he retired to his room. Prince Talal led me across the fields, for it was dark by now. My servant, Ali, was waiting for me. His face was deep cut with an Arabic sign, slashed into the flesh. I drank a glass of orange juice and crept into the valley between the cushions, to sleep.

I began my work early on the second day, after a hot bath and an English breakfast. At ten o'clock, the Amir came to my sitting-room. I liked him already. He was full of smiles and jokes, but these passed and we talked of my book. The story of European rulers seems dull compared with the history and legend which the Amir unfolded to me : the journey of Abraham, Hagar and Ishmael across the desert and the finding of the sacred well of Zem Zem : the building of Mekka and, through descent from Ishmael, the coming of Mahommed. The Amir Abdullah traces his descent from Mahommed, through Fatimah, the Prophet's daughter. He drew maps of the country for me, telling me the stories of Ishmael, with the help of Prince Talal's interpretation. He seemed to be swept up in my plan and long after our interview, he was writing pages of notes in beautiful red Arabic. The A.D.C. brought him dictionaries, Prince Talal stood beside him with the open Koran and a shy youngster held six big books of Moslem history into which the Amir peeped every now and then.

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The strangest man in the court was the A.D.C., a Nigerian, black as ebony, with four or five deep lines cut into his cheeks. Every morning he came to my sitting-room, to talk while I ate my breakfast, or to play a tango upon my gramophone. He once told me that he had danced the tango with a 'first class Paris lady' when he was a young officer in the Turkish army. We usually walked out among the wild flowers before the morning was over, or, if I was busy at my desk, he would come back from his solitary walk with a bunch of flowers, nipped off without their stalks. They were usually anemones. 'See,' he would say, 'I will walk and think of my illustrious English friend who sits here with his pen and ink and I bring him flowers for although I am only a black man, I have a spirit for beauty inside me.'

When we walked together, we always came back with our arms full of flowers. As we meandered from field to field, the chatty little man would talk to me of his past. By birth he was a Nigerian and by blood an Arab. The marks upon his cheeks, cut there when he was a boy, were tribal signs by which lost or stolen members of the Nigerian tribes are identified. The marks radiated out into his cheeks, from the corners of his heavy, milk-chocolate lips. He spoke French, German, English, Turkish and Arabic. About two hundred years ago, his family migrated from Arabia to Nigeria with two purposes. They were both slave traders and missionaries. This linking of interests must have brought them prosperity, for all the sons were sent

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to Egyptian or Jerusalem schools. Although my friend was a Major in the Turkish Army, he professed undying love for the British people and deep respect for their ways of government. 'Other parliaments make their laws as a punishment to the people, but the British make their laws as a guide.' Also, 'Other parliaments are tyrants over the people but the British Parliament is the servant of the people.' I did not dare to discuss his latter observation.

I turn to my diary for a record of the days in the Palace at Amman, for the pictures seem to grow dim in a paraphrase.

March 28th.

The Translator came to me this morning. He is from Egypt and he wears a fez, like a poppy-coloured flower pot. He is also tutor to the Amir's second son, Prince Naif, who is shy, eighteen and silent. The translator likes to air his higgledy-piggledy English before the Amir and to-day, when we were at luncheon, he said to me, without warning, 'Mr. Bolitho, could you please tell me what is a testicle?' There were about fourteen sitting to luncheon and I felt that I was on the edge of a long and embarrassing conversation. I answered, 'It is an American bird which lives in the Rocky Mountains.' Then I dug my nose into my food and would talk no more.

I saw the tutor with a dictionary in the afternoon and he gave me a strange look as we walked in to

dinner. His best effort was in the evening when the Amir was telling me the story of Hagar and Sarah. He wished the tutor to translate the word *bondwoman* from the Arabic. 'Hagar was Sarah's bondwoman.' The tutor said, 'Hagar was Sarah's concubine.' I felt that this was barely true and the Amir saw my confusion. Then it all had to be explained to the Amir. This was not easy.

I like Prince Talal more and more. He is slight and shy, but the shyness is passing slowly. He came to my room about twelve o'clock this morning. He was wearing his usual long, black cloak, ornamented with gold thread. 'May we walk to the horses?' he asked. So we set out over the white field which was covered by flowers. He looked like a monk walking over snow as his black cloak swept over the white blossoms. A tall, black servant followed us. This was rather a bother: also, our progress and our talk were every now and then interrupted by some stray Bedouin or some scavenging youngster standing up as we passed: sometimes running forward to kiss Prince Talal's hand and sometimes his cheek. But there are hollows into which the Bedouins do not intrude and here we walked and talked in peace. He came to my room this afternoon with some gramophone records. They were weird Arab songs with melancholy, twanging themes. I played him some of mine, especially Bach's *Air on the G String* and *The Londonderry Air*. We drank tea, ate cake and talked of London, for he was at Sandhurst and he knows us well.

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March 31st.

My servant Ali called me at eight o'clock with a glass of orange juice. His black face is split in two by his smile. He comes from Egypt. He is a devout Moslem and sometimes at sunset I see him kneeling in the middle of the dining-room floor, his prayer rug spread under him, his head bent obediently towards Mekka. Yesterday I gave him a silver ring with a red stone and to-day when he called me, he turned his hand towards me so that I could see the ring upon his finger. The marks upon Ali's cheeks are different from those on the cheeks of the A.D.C. Ali is a Nubian. The signs were cut into his face when he was a little boy and they make the name of Allah upon both cheeks.

With all its fantasy, the English of the tutor is more pleasant than that of the legal man who came to luncheon to-day. He began with 'Hullo, my dear,' and when I said 'good-bye,' he answered, 'Don't mention it, my dear.' There was a beautiful, charming old man in the evening who is a friend of King Feisal, come over from Baghdad. He was silent, sitting in the tent after dinner, toying with his amber beads. The Amir asked him to play his great banjo and we lolled back, breathing the air that came in from the fields and listening to old tunes which the Amir had learned when he was a boy in Mekka.

April 1st.

This morning, about eleven o'clock, the Amir sent

for me to come to him in the main part of the palace. I was taken across the courtyard to the centre of the building within which is the harem, and there the A.D.C. led me over a marble hall with two astounding pieces of furniture : long looking glasses, one of which made me look tall and emaciated and one which made me look short and fat. They were given to the Amir by the Chief of Police and they bring an incongruous note from Wembley to Amman. From the hall I walked into a small room where the Amir received me, in more state than ever before. He was splendidly dressed in a long white cloak of softish stuff, edged with gold. His head-dress was white and the argyl which bound it to his forehead was white and gold. On one side sat Prince Talal and on the other Prince Naif. The Amir was sitting at a desk, inlaid with mother-of-pearl. The rugs were rich and, through an open door, I could see into an inner room where photographs of the British Royal family were standing upon a table, the King elevated above the others on a little stool. The Amir looked very handsome and his face was lively with expression as he talked. I did not know the reason for the grand clothes, for we talked of the book as we do every day. His eye-lids were darkened with *kohl* which made them seem big and fiery. He talked of the dangers between fact and fiction in writing Arab history and said how much he wished the notes which he gave me to be pure in scholarship. For the first time I saw a photograph of the late King Hussein : a fine

old face, proud, well-bred and extremely sad, because of the eyes. It had been taken in Cyprus to which the King went as an exile from Mekka when 'Ibn Saud usurped his heritage and his throne. The Amir sent Prince Talal away to bring me a photograph of King Hussein for myself and it now stands upon my table. Even a photograph helps one to come nearer to understanding the character of the sad old man. After looking at it again and again, the eyes remain the focus of interest more than the forehead or the chin. They are calm but full of decision and power.

April 2nd.

To Jerusalem for the Hunt Ball, a gay, charming and unique occasion.

April 6th.

This morning, as I was sitting in my room, a young Arab came in and tore a 'day' off my calendar. It seemed rather foolish as the calendar is for last year. He was elegantly dressed in white and gold. I do not know who he is. He smiled and then he tore off another 'day.' His eye-lids were stained with *kohl*. He could not speak to me, but he pointed to my gramophone and I left my work to play him *I've got a date with an angel*, which seemed to give him pleasure. He tore one more 'day' from the calendar and then, as the Amir appeared, he hurried away.

Later in the afternoon, Prince Naif came to my

room. I had told him in the morning that I would be willing to help him with his English lessons and with shy care, he read me the story of *Ali Baba and the Forty Thieves*. And then came the Amir himself, full of laughter. He imitated people, with an actor's skill, and he talked of London, lingering affectionately over his recollections of Harrods' and the Crystal Palace.

April 7th.

Being a devout hypochondriac, I am pleased by the daily attentions of the Amir's doctor. If my eyes are tired, there are drops for them and if my throat is rough, there is gargle. My health is watched through a microscope. But what pleases me most is when the doctor places drops in the Prime Minister's eyes, before we go into luncheon. The Amir has already been attended to, and when the doctor has dropped the globules of drug into his eyes, the exalted patient sits up and smiles at us. But not so the Prime Minister! He cringes and stretches. His hands work in nervous agony and his long legs twitch. He rises from his torture, the only serious man in the room, for all, including the Amir, are chuckling with delight over the wretched man's discomfort. To-day, the Amir joined us at luncheon. The morning Arab newspaper had included a long account of the ravages television would work upon the peace of the world and the Amir was depressed by the tale. 'It means that we may all be photographed in our baths,' he said.

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He was pleased when I told him that there would be advantages for sovereigns who would be able to see what their Prime Ministers were doing behind their backs. The Prime Minister grinned too, but not with the same cheerfulness. The Amir wishes me to teach him English and after luncheon we sat down over Sale's translation of the Koran. We began,

Praise be to God, the Lord of all creatures ; the most merciful, the king of the day of judgment. Thee do we worship, and of thee do we beg assistance. Direct us in the right way, in the way of those to whom thou hast been gracious ; not of those against whom thou art incensed, nor of those who go astray.

It was beautiful to hear the Amir's quiet voice reading the words in slow English. He kissed the book afterwards and, taking my arm, he said, 'You see, we have begun this work with the words of God and the blessing of God and it will be well for us.' He talked to me of his quiet life in the early morning. He rises at half-past four o'clock every day. He baths and washes himself for prayer and then, when his prayers are ended, he reads three chapters of the Koran. Then he drinks coffee and his family come into his room, to wish him 'Good-morning.' He makes little jokes with them and he asks them what they wish for the day. His Prime Minister comes to him early and then the Amir goes to his office. The rest of the day I know, for I see him almost every hour.

April 8th.

To-day is the beginning of the pilgrimage to Mekka and the Amir received congratulations from everybody this morning. First, the Sheiks and leading Arabs climbed the hill about seven o'clock. At eight, the British officers came. The Amir fasts to-day, so I lunched alone with Prince Talal and Prince Naif. They wore golden head-dresses. I put on my morning coat and top-hat and looked as smart as I could. But I felt foolish as I walked among the camels and the donkeys, to the delight of the many brown urchins who had come up from the valley to see the splendour. Ali had brushed my top-hat the wrong way and it looked dismal. I was received by the Amir, alone, after the officials and the Sheiks had gone away. He was sitting behind the pearl inlaid table in the little room to which I went before. I made a speech of congratulation which was translated by Sheik Fuad and when I ended, Amir Abdullah rose from his chair and came over to me. He held my hand and thanked me. I think he was pleased with what I said. Although he did not join us at luncheon, he came afterwards and was full of mirth. Little misses him, for he can imitate and caricature the more pompous of those who serve him, with accuracy and delight. He said after luncheon that I am a born diplomat. This pleased me.

April 11th.

Three miles away is the Royal Air Force station,

a stoutly British colony, efficient and virile, incongruous in this sleepy land where men dream of the conquests and changes they are not strong enough to bring about. I like sometimes to run away from the timeless ease of my life here and become part of the bustling life of the station ; to join myself again with British practicality. The airmen are producing *Journey's End*, and I am to play the part of Captain Hardy. It seems fantastic to lie back in my tent during the morning, listening to the Amir's tales of old Mekka and then rush off to a rehearsal of the play. Then back here again, to find the old musician dozing in the corner of the tent, his banjo fallen across his knees, his amber beads fallen from his hands : to see the Amir out in the field, watching the branding of his camels, and hear the little fountain play . . . the fountain copied from one in the gardens of the lost palace in Mekka.

This morning Prince Talal came to my room with a bunch of carnations, sweet smelling, but cut with such short stalks that I could only float them in a saucer. To-night after dinner I crossed the fields behind the Palace to a celebration of the circumcision of a little boy. Prince Talal and Prince Naif led me. We came to a big tent, pitched beside a little Arab house. The moon was big and white and it lighted the field of white flowers. Prince Talal's robe swept them as we walked. Within the tent, towards the open side, there was a fire, with many brass coffee pots sitting among the embers. Three camel saddles were placed upon a rug for us

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and we leaned against them. Near by was the old father of the boy who had been circumcised. There were singers and musicians who had already eaten their mutton and rice. Near to us were the veterans, silent people, curled upon the earth. Some wore long beards. The scene was dominated by a tall, young Yemenite, black and lithe, with a red head-dress, a blue skirt and two gold and crimson tassels hanging from his girdle in front of him. He held a huge curved sword above his head and he led the line of Arabs in their dancing. Their voices moaned upon half tones. We drank coffee and watched the old men warming crudely shaped drums over the flames. The dance was merely a rhythmic beating of the feet upon the earth and the song was a war cry. From this subdued movement, the dancers changed into a lighter step in which their bodies swayed like fronds. With this, they hissed: a low, musical intaking of breath between the teeth. There was a little black boy near to us, no more than six years old, with a perfectly round face. There was an older man next to him who rose now and then to fan the dying flames to life again with the hem of his skirt. The dancers retreated from the glow of the fire so that they were dim and half swallowed into the outer darkness. The glow upon their bodies changed from the warm red of the flames to the cold light of the moon. Their voices faded too into a gentle and unassuming dirge. Then the tall black Yemenite stepped away from them to dance alone, magnificently. He became wilder in his movements, his

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great sword rising to cut the sky or falling low, near to the fire. The singing ended and the men scattered away among the company. The lonely dancer stood still, his sword docile at his side. The celebration was over and we walked back over the fields. The moon had drawn a thick mask of clouds over her face and Prince Talal took my arm to guide me between the treacherous stones. Prince Naif walked with us, in silence. I am writing this note in bed. I have become rather fond of my green silk cover. It has a faint design of cranes and lotus flowers which I did not notice in the beginning.

April 14th.

To-night we produce *Journey's End* before the Amir. I open the play singing,

*One and two, it's with Maud and Lou,
Three and four, two girls more.*

These sudden changes from Arab life to the R.A.F. are good for my balance. I could soon lose all sense of time in this warm, lazy life in which yesterday and to-morrow are charming but to-day does not exist.

April 18th.

This morning we flew to the wonderful new pipe line which is to carry the oil from Iraq, one thousand miles across the desert, to the sea. The Amir, Prince Naif, the Prime Minister and the doctor all

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came in a hot, closed air-craft. We saw the blasting of miles of the deep trench through which the pipes are to run and the amazing work of the engineers, following at the heels of the men who prepare the trench. They weld the great pipes, paint them and cover them with thick wrapping. Then they lower them into the earth with a succession of machines which work with the ease and calm of fine instruments in the hands of a surgeon.

April 20th.

The Amir was tired to-day from his long flight into the desert and in the morning he sent me a message that the book must be put aside until to-morrow. He retired to his tent in the field. About one o'clock, when we were about to sit down for our luncheon in the palace, a freed bondman came for me and said that His Highness wished me to lunch with him in the tent. The servant wore a long, turquoise blue robe and there was a silver-hilted dagger at his waist. The Amir was not alone. A Greek in smart European clothes sat next to him and he acted as interpreter for us. Later in the afternoon Prince Talal joined us and through him, the Amir told me a story of the early days in Mekka.

When the Amir's father, King Hussein, was a boy, he lived in the palace in Mekka. As he grew towards manhood, he was never allowed to be alone nor to be idle. From his books he was taken to his horses and then back to his books again.

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About this time, a strange story was told to Hussein by a traveller who came from a village on the road to Medina. There lived in this village a woman who was slim and beautiful. Her husband was old and his skin was hard and crackled as a peach stone. When this old man was saddling his camels or wrangling in the bazaar, his wife would press her face against the lattice and watch the youths who walked by. In this way, her days were tortured by her idle desires and her nights were hideous with the snoring of her husband, who no longer loved her.

One day, her husband was going upon a long journey. When he was gone one hour, his wife espied a youth from her window and throwing a rose down to him, she drew him into her house and there beneath the white net over her bed they played all manner of games and were delighted. Vanquished by their own zeal, they lay back and in this moment they heard a noise in 'the court-yard below. The wife ran to the window and saw her husband, who had returned with some merchants. She hid her lover in a box of corn and beat her face with her hands and cried, 'Oh, what am I to do? He will kill me.'

Her lover, so brave and stalwart an hour ago with his kisses and his mischief, was crushed beneath the lid of the grain box, shivering like a leaf in the wind. The husband came into the house with his merchants and he said to his wife, 'Hurry, prepare us food, for these men will buy my grain. Hurry, so that I may empty the box and weigh the grain and be paid in gold.'

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When the wife was told this, she looked in fear towards the grain box and then she went into the kitchen to prepare the food. But her fingers shook and she put this in that and that in this and the food was not fit to be eaten. While she was thus perplexed, another woman, heavy with years, came to see her, from a house nearby, and she said, 'What ails you? You have put the nuts in the coffee and the rice in the tea. Are you mad?'

The wife beat her face with her hands again and told the old woman her story. Then the neighbour said, 'I will help you, if I have your word that this is a secret between us.' She ran into the courtyard and into the field as quickly as her old legs would carry her. She drove an ass into a deep cistern so that it seemed that it would be drowned. Then she cried aloud, 'My ass is drowning; come quick, all you men who are strong. Come to help an old woman to save her ass.'

Hearing her cry, the husband and the merchants ran from the house to save the ass and while they were in the field, the wife opened the grain box and drew her lover out. They kissed once and then the youth climbed down into the court-yard and ran away. So the husband and the merchants saved the ass, the neighbour saved the honour of the wife and she was able to cook new food for the men and know that her secret was safe for ever.

April 21st.

I now have my own tent, pitched a quarter of a

mile from the palace, looking down into the valley. I doze during the long, warm afternoons, drunk on the smell of the flowers. I see the Ethiopians working in the garden and the Circassian soldiers on guard. I clap my hands when I wish for my tea and Ali comes over the field, with a tray. There is only one un-beautiful note. Beside me is a Flit spray and my sport is to lie back and shoot the persistent flies.

The first day of the Moslem Year.

This morning was the first of the Moslem New Year and we have been both grand and gay. All the great Arabs came to offer their wishes to the Amir. I waited until the ceremony was over and then I went to him alone. He was sitting in the big room with the pressed velvet furniture. With him were two Sheiks, squatting at his feet. They rose as I walked into the room and I made a little speech of congratulation. Then the Amir gave me a gold Turkish coin which I am never to spend. He had given them to his children early in the morning. He was in great form after luncheon and he made pencil sketches of all of us in turn. Then I taught him his sentence of English for the day. 'My eyes are very strong.'

This afternoon I rode with Prince Naif, the second son. We rode for an hour and a half. His saddle was fringed with blue, silver, black and white. Mine was an honest English one. We rode over the hills of flowers and among the Roman ruins. But the afternoon was spoiled by the presence of too

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many servants and the numerous little goatherds running up to kiss the boy's hand and knee.

We went for a walk afterwards and Prince Naif brought his gun. Two servants followed at our heels. Suddenly, from a field of pink stocks smelling sickly sweet, a lark flew up into the sunlight. It sang beautifully and its wings fluttered incessantly as moth wings. Prince Naif raised his gun and fired. The song broke suddenly, a shower of feathers fell upon the wild stocks and the lark hurtled down and was lost among the flowers. He shot seven of them, all while they were singing. The servant picked them up. One was still struggling alive and I begged him to twist its neck. He tore off the little head and threw it into a hollow full of poppies. On the way home I missed a poisonous snake by six inches. Prince Naif clutched me and pulled me aside.

This morning we had a company of Arab actors and actresses in the throne room and they performed a play called *The Caliph*. I was taken up and put into an ornate arm-chair next to the Amir. The Princes sat around us. Behind us, screened by gossamer, were the ladies of the harem. At the far end of the room were the actors, playing without scenery. They are supposed to be the best Arab actors and actresses of the day. While they played their vicious melodrama, the Amir's servants came in and out of the room, crossing the 'stage' with various properties. Thus one never knew which people were acting and which were stage hands.

There was a great deal of murder and suicide in the play. The chief actor came afterwards and tempted me to an old joke. He said 'I trust you like my execution.' I could not resist saying that I was wholly in favour of it.

May 10th.

I am either wide awake and energetic, or physically tired and sleepy; a healthy state. To-day was amusing. When I appeared to ride, instead of the usual two servants, there was an armed guard of five Arabs. I was to ride with Prince Naif as usual. I asked him why we were specially guarded to-day and he said. 'We are riding home through the town after we have been in the hills.' I was disturbed.

We rode out on the hills, passing a five-foot snake, within a mile or so of the Palace. I am nervous and shy of riding. I enjoy it, but I know that I do not do it well. I always feel as Lord Elgin must have felt at his first great review in India. He had always disliked horses. A servant came up to him during the Review, with an important cable from the India Office. 'Go away,' said the Viceroy. 'Can't you see that I am busy riding?' I am a little more confident here as the Amir's horses are perfectly trained. From the hills we descended into Amman and then the fury began. One horseman advanced before us, a revolver at his hip. Prince Naif asked me to stay close to him and I rode neck to neck with him during the ordeal. The other horsemen followed. When we came to the fringe of Amman, the

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people stood up from the pavements as we passed. Prince Naif returned their salutes and bowings and the man riding before us swept the pedestrians and the motor-cars aside. Every little Arab emerged from his shop ; children ran down the side walks. I realised that the glory of Britain was in my hands, so I divided my efforts between—

- (a) Keeping a dignified but pleasant smile upon my face ;
- (b) Keeping my horse neck to neck with Prince Naif's ;
- (c) Controlling an animal which became self-willed in the pandemonium of the town.

For almost half-an-hour we rode through the crowded streets. The young Prince, eighteen, suddenly assumed great dignity. His manner was excellent. I wondered, as the hordes of people oozed into the roadway, whether there might not be an insurgent among them. There might be one angry or mad little man with a gun. Nothing happened. Sometimes a devout Moslem would run out and press his forehead against Prince Naif's knee. - Mostly they saluted. My smile was fixed : a faint smile, designed to indicate that I had a kind heart but a strong mind. This, I think, is the smile suited to English dominion in the Near East. We rode on, past lettuce sellers and little shops, the mosque, laden asses, camels and motor-cars. Not easy riding. I emerged from it all with my horse still between my legs.

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This evening the Amir came to my room while I was playing backgammon with the Chamberlain. He was in a merry mood. I saw it in his eye. He stood behind me and as I was playing, I felt a tickling on my ear. I realised that he was flicking me with the fringe of his head-dress and that he wished me to think that it was a fly. I did not wish to disappoint him, so I brushed it away several times before I turned about suddenly and discovered him. He plays with the servants and is most human with them. He said to me at luncheon to-day, 'I could not have a servant near to me who was not my friend. Sometimes my officials may not be my friends, but those who serve me in my life in the Palace must be my friends.'

Most of his servants have been with him for at least ten years. At luncheon to-day, there was a Nubian standing behind the table, a tall man, black, with a flaming scarlet head-dress. I said to the doctor, who speaks perfect English, 'The colour of that head-dress is beautiful against his black face.' The Amir, who sometimes understands odd phrases of English, had followed my eye and my remark. He smiled and said to me through the doctor, 'Yes, Mr. Bolitho, everything that servant has done since he came to me has been good and beautiful.' The man understood as the Amir spoke. Then he told me how the servant had gone out and had brought in two prisoners who had escaped into the desert. They were enemies of the Amir and a danger to his life. The Amir described the heroic and lonely

journey of the servant. They smiled at each other when it was finished. I have never seen such devotion between master and servant.

I think, from my limited observation, that one of the strengths of the Moslems is their inclination to judge people by motives rather than acts. There may be craftiness, but when there is faith it is a rock. One sees it here, between the few old servants and their master.

Late in May.

Both King Ali and King Feisal* have arrived at the palace, from Baghdad. First, King Ali came. He was the last ruler of the Hejaz before 'Ibn Saud led his victorious invasion. It is little wonder that the dour, militant figure of 'Ibn Saud prevailed. King Ali wears the signs of his history. His long, slim hands, his sensitive face and gentle voice show him to be the son of Kings but less equipped to be a King himself. To the European who stubbornly thinks of the Arab princes as men of the desert, untutored and wild, this delicate and aristocratic ruler would be a surprise. I could not help comparing his lot with the exile of a Stuart prince, bereft of his power through the new, healthy and unbeautiful invasion of puritanical forces. For three days before King Feisal arrived, I was able to see the quiet, dignified figure of King Ali moving in and about the palace. I met him at luncheon time and often in the

* Both King Ali and King Feisal have died since these notes were written.



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evening. His expressive hands fascinated me. They seemed to be transparent and they moved with the grace of little wings. They were beautiful hands but they were too small and subdued to be mighty. He talked to me of Rabindranath Tagore, whom he knows. Struggling against the barrier of language, I caught glimpses of the mystic rather than of the king. His secrets were his own. The fierce story of Muhammad his ancestor had become dim in the intervening centuries. King Ali was a gentle dreamer, dumbfounded, or perhaps oblivious to the terrific changes which have come to the Arab countries since 1918.

When King Feisal came, he was different from his brother as a wasp from a moth. The Amīr Abdullah and his brother, King Ali, cling affectionately to their history. Their prayers and their eyes are turned towards Mekka. But King Feisal has learned the western tune in Paris and in London. His hands too are slim and his features fine and aristocratic. But his eyes are cold and sharp as blades. He came into the company incongruously. Where we had talked of the lost glory of Constantinople, of Abdul Hamid and of life in the palace in Mekka, now we talked of or listened to stories of London, of luncheon with Mr Bernard Shaw and of current politics. 'Shaw said to me. . . ' 'When I arrive in London and stay at Buckingham Palace. . . .' King Feisal shook me out of the soft comfort of my dream.

I first met King Feisal before luncheon. We went into the dining-room and I sat at the table with the

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three sons of Hussein. In Arabia the old fantasy of the divine right of princes is ended. The Hashemite princes can no longer cry to the Prophet, or to the dim and ancient story of Ishmael for their power. King Feisal seems to realise this. He alone has tried the artifice of playing to both audiences, of trying to make west meet east. He is the least attractive of the three brothers but the most powerful. He is the only one who has troubled to learn English; the only one who has fought their fatal resignation to 'to-morrow.' He talked to me of London, a little boastfully. He was able to juggle with the great names of which his brothers had but dimly heard. He had read Galsworthy and he thought all England was peopled with the characters of the Forsyte family. He could say, a little grandly, 'When I was talking to the King,' or 'When I met the Prince of Wales at luncheon.' He asked me one unnerving question while we were sitting at the table. 'What do you think of Colonel Lawrence, Mr. Bolitho?' 'He is one of our greatest writers,' I answered. 'I am to see him when I arrive in London,' King Feisal said. 'He is a wonderful man . . . born out of his generation.'

After luncheon, I sat with King Feisal alone, in a little room with stiff-backed chairs. 'I am pleased that you are writing the life of my father,' he said, but I knew that he was not pleased because I had sought his brother's help before his. It was strange, to be alone with the brother of the Amir and King Ali and find him so different: so cold, so gracious

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with his coldness, with the eyes and fascination of a beautiful snake.

May 28th.

I came back from the desert yesterday. My work was interrupted by the diversion of King Feisal's visit, so I went out into the desert and, for five days, I lived under canvas with an R A F convoy near to Katrani. I messed with the airmen and came to know them well over sausages and beer. I am more and more impressed by the foundation of character upon which the service is growing. One little incident seemed to reveal this to me more than any other. I was at Ma'an when an aircraft landed, because of some slight mechanical defect. I was talking to the mechanic in the hangar while he was at work and, referring to the contentment of the station, he said, 'You see, sir, we feel that we are trusted. An officer lands like this, walks off to the mess and leaves his aircraft to me. I do what has to be done and he flies off in an hour or two without ever doubting my work, in a sense putting his life in my hands. It seems to draw the best out of you, if you know what I mean.'

I went back to the Officers' Mess and the pilot who had landed with the disabled machine completed the story. I tried to tell him how happy I was, living away from both sophisticated amusement and comfort, stimulated by the morale and friendliness of the life on an R.A.F. station. He said, 'Well, you see, they are all such a good lot

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of fellows. Take to-day. I land here out of the blue, hand my machine over to a man I have never seen before and I know that when he sends to tell me that it is ready for me to take off, I can trust his work and have no further bother.' I thought the slight incident important as a glimpse into the spirit of the youngest of the services.

While I was staying in the desert at Katrani, I helped to fill in a Turkish trench which seared the desert, in the country over which Lawrence fought. The second day we went to an old Roman well, set in an oasis surrounded by desolate country. We found a wide, deep pool with shining stones upon which the great toads sat with pulsating chests. We took off our shoes and stepped from the burning sand into the cool water. There were little fish and about the edge of the pool, succulent herbs and bushes, all the more lively and rich because of the arid desert in which they lay. The pool had one outlet: a slim stream which ran down the valley, with oleanders in flower, and crane and pigeon, which were nettled at our approach. For these five days the world was beyond our touch. I did not wind my watch and meal times were decided by our hunger: bed-time decided by our sleepiness, after the hot, lovely day. I came back here last evening and to-day, my birthday, I went to swim in the Dead Sea. We went by motor-car from Amman to Jericho and drank orange juice on the verandah of the little hotel. Then to the shores of the Dead Sea where an enterprising Jew has built a bathing shed and restaurant.

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It was strange to see this ridiculous buoyant water, in which one may sit as in an arm-chair. The Dead Sea hides the walls of Sodom and Gomorrah beneath its surface, but the Zionists have turned it into a watering-place, with the screeches and merriment of Southend, to drown, still further, the memory of Gomorrah.

June 15th, Baalbek, in Syria

I am writing on a balcony with the ancient columns of a temple to Jupiter before me. There are slim poplars between us, and behind the temple, the snow-topped spine of Mount Hermon. Below my balcony there is a coffee house in which the Arabs chatter so loudly that the fountain in the courtyard cannot always be heard. Now and then the waiter disappears within and puts a record on the gramophone: an Arab record which makes a wailing accompaniment to the gabble and the click of the backgammon pieces. As I sit on the balcony, the balustrade hides the coffee house, the waiter and the fountain, and although their noises come to me in a medley, I can see only the pinnacles of the apricot and poplar trees and a few pomegranates, their flowers burning among the green. The snow upon Hermon seems incongruous for we are baking here in the town.

Last evening I went up to the ruins of the Roman temples of Baalbek.

The German Emperor came here in 1898 and began the work of digging out the ruined city. The Germans must have done their restoration well,

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leaving traces of the later Arab and Christian buildings, so necessary to a full comprehension of what the city has meant in the different civilisations. But the French are removing all the later work so that there will be nothing but the original Roman. I suppose that purists and scholars will approve of this. But, for me, the appearance of the beautiful Arab doorways and arches alongside the Roman columns makes the place more human and alive. There were three temples: to Jupiter, Bacchus and Apollo. Everything is the 'biggest in the Roman Empire.' It must have been very blatant and enormous and overpowering. The colossal pillars of the temple of Bacchus with swallows flying among them, rise to a roof of intricate sculpture.

Constantinople, June 18th.

I travelled from Baalbek at night and came to Turkey with the dawn, surprised by the beauty of the endless valleys, and the mountains, which once guarded the dying Byzantine capital from Saracen invasion. Every valley burned with poppies: the wild flowers almost touched the train as we thundered past the peaceful farms. The modest goat-hair tents of the Bedouins still appeared in places, but they were few. I was coming nearer and nearer to the sophistication of Europe. Slowly the illusion of the East faded away. The motor-car and the telegraph wire, western clothes and petrol pumps pressed in upon me insistently. I am told that there are three hundred motor-cars in the forbidden city

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of Mekka now. How then should these nearer, accessible places escape ?

I came upon the Bosphorus in the late afternoon in the state of excitement with which one must see Constantinople for the first time. I bathed in the sea of Marmora and I climbed the hill to Yildiz returning in a little boat. From the water, one may see the unbelievable bubbles of the domes of the mosques and the crowning beauty of St. Sofia, 'hung by a chain of gold from the height of heaven.'

Outside, the noises of the change and the dictatorship are incessant. But within St. Sofia, the noises are not heard. One stands beneath the gold domes, which are like the very arches of heaven, dizzy and amazed by their majesty. Still, with all the pandemonium outside, one may stand where Justinian stood, and understand why it was that when he beheld his work, he said : 'Oh, Solomon, I have surpassed thee.'

My recollection of Trans Jordan ends pleasantly, in a garden in Kent. A few weeks after I arrived back in England, I was asked to stay in a house in Kent, to meet Aircraftsman Shaw. I have always felt that I understood his wish to change his name and forget the identity of Lawrence of Arabia. I knew too that he avoided talking of Arabia and when I saw the short, unimpressive figure crossing the lawn towards us, I made up my mind not to mention Trans Jordan to him. He wore his aircraftsman's uniform and looked a little incongruous, moving among the luxury of a garden in which

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cypresses shaded a blue swimming pool and bronze gods held court upon the lawns. There were many people, sitting beside a pool of lotus lilies. As Shaw took his chair among them, they peppered him with questions, for it seemed inevitable that he should be the focus of our attention. I walked away towards a shaded grove at the end of which was a statue of George the Fourth, wearing his crown, which once stood in the gardens of Stowe. The grove was carpeted with autumn crocuses and above the yellow and white garden near by, terraces and hedges rose, upon one another, until they seemed to touch the sky. As I walked, I heard somebody following me. It was Lawrence, who had left the company beside the pool. He said, as he came up to me, 'I read your book on the Prince Consort and liked it. What are you doing now?'

I said, 'I am sorry, but I have to confess that I am writing a life of King Hussein. I have been staying in Trans Jordan, with the Amir, to do it. But don't let us talk about that. I know you do not wish to.'

'Not usually,' he said, 'but this is different, isn't it? What made you wish to write it?'

I told him of the accident—a dinner party at Windsor and myself sitting opposite a friend who lives in the desert, to the south of Trans Jordan. He had known Hussein and he said to me, during dinner, 'I wish you would come out and write the story . . . the Hashemite Princes have nobody to champion them in England. You could write a great story about Hussein.'

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I said 'yes' and, with my usual mad lack of quiet consideration, I had sailed for Trans Jordan within a few days.

Lawrence lead the talk then. There was no need for me to be reticent about the subject which he was alleged to shun. Now that Lawrence is dead, those who talked with him even once must cherish the memory and the privilege. It was something of an adventure to be allowed to break past the shy manner, the almost genteel choosing of words; to be allowed to see the changing expressions of his blue eyes and to listen to him speak of the Arabs. We walked far. A giant grew out of the little man. There was a note of authority in what he said. He did not discuss, in the way of good conversation, but delivered the judgments of long deliberation. Everything he said seemed to be rigidly true. He had the rare gift of being able to tidy up the conglomeration of thoughts in one's own brain . . . to be able to show what one was *trying* to think. He held a lens between one's own jumbled notions and the truth, and he focussed it so that, at last, one saw clearly. He wished me to like King Feisal, he said. I told Lawrence that King Feisal had asked me what I thought of him and that, in my confusion, all I could say was, 'He is one of our greatest writers.' Lawrence smiled and said, 'Yes, I think you were right not to speak of the Arabian part of my life. If I am remembered at all, I think it will be as a writer. As a matter of fact, that is what I wish.'

During the days that followed, we walked together

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in either the morning or the afternoon. He was shy, at least silent, in a crowded drawing-room. When a woman guest asked him, 'Why don't you marry?' he answered, 'I am not interested in women. I have never found one that interested me.' The insistent woman was silent then.

He talked of his own life as we walked. I understood so well, in the light of his explanation, why he wished to creep away from both splendour and lime-light. He told me of his little cottage, of his plans for writing and when he talked of his motor-cycle, he was rather like a little boy confessing his devotion to model trains. Lawrence repeated the advice his namesake had given me when I first came to London. D. H. Lawrence had stood with me at his window in Hampstead and he had said, 'You must go away and live on three pounds a week.' The hero of Arabia, turned aircraftsman, also said, 'One should go away and live on three pounds a week.'

With all his power and the glamour attached to his name, one felt a strange protective instinct when he was near . . . as if one's own brain were a clumsy machine and one's ideals corrupted, in comparison. The least one could do was to guard and pay homage to a man who still clung fiercely to truth, scorning all that was merely expedient and obeying motives which, one imagines, are found among intelligent saints.

Chapter Twelve

WHEN I had lived in England for some years, there came a time when I wished to own my own house and garden. I had already had my tussle with the obvious temptations : a little house near to Salzburg, near to lofty mountains and a stretch of water, with a little boat, rubbing its nose against the landing at the foot of my garden : then a villa on the shores of Lake Maggiore, with one great room, eighty feet long, overlooking the water. There was to be only one spare bedroom so that the house could never be turned into a caravanserai ; my own bedroom, sitting-room and bathroom were to be shut off from the rest of the house by a tall, wrought-iron gate. There was to be neither clock nor telephone and the only reminder of the passing of time was to be an hour-glass on the kitchen mantelpiece so that my morning egg would not become a cannon-ball. My servants were to wear rubber-soled shoes and be dumb. The friends who were to come to sleep in my one spare bedroom were to have neither too much wit nor too much energy : simple and uniform people of the middle course, neither Rufillus smelling ' like a scent-box ' nor Gargonius smelling ' like a goat ' : neither virtuous to the extreme of censoriousness nor persistently lewd . neither hearty men who would do nothing but row and jump and chase a ball, hunt and shoot and, within a room, sit like dumb oafs,

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nor prancing and simpering dilettanti, to perch upon the arms of my chairs and chatter like parrots. The room was to be used by a succession of good friends who could be eloquent in both silence and in speech, able to enjoy good food and to relish a bout of candour, indeed rudeness, as a privilege among friends. I once made a list of these guests, on the back of the sheet of paper upon which I had already sketched the plan of my villa beside the lake of Maggiore. Then my dream changed. I walked up a slope near to the border of Bavaria and chose the view which was to stretch from my bedroom window. It looked over a field of meadow saffron. This slide was withdrawn from the magic lantern. One day, in the valley of Sharon, I tried to buy two acres of land over which I had walked on the day before, on the shores of Galilee. A legend of the town told me that Mary Magdalene had walked there. The hurly-burly of the world had never molested the peace of the two little acres. They lay against a hill which one crossed on the way to Nazareth. Five miles along the shore was Capernaum : in the neighbouring field, an Arab shepherd, playing his reed flute, lured the dusty sheep home to the fold. In many, many places, an idle hour was enlivened by a pencil and a sheet of paper upon which I planned my house. It is pleasant to dream of a home out of England, for the enchantment of foreign lands lingers long after other childhood dreams have faded away. But they were all fancies and the sheets of paper were torn up and allowed to blow away, out of the

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windows of the trains in which I toyed with my dream I stayed in England because the English are the only people with whom I could live for ever. Their laws are protective and never destructive, their censorship is of manners and never of morals and the divisions of their society are defined by a sense of responsibility and not maintained by intimidation or fear. Neither the drums of discipline nor the violins of languor are played to excess. The tunes of both maintain a reasonable balance. If one does not offend one's neighbour by living selfishly nor step over the stile of good manners, one may remain an individual in England as in no other country. It was not sentiment alone which caused me to turn my back upon Maggiore and Galilee in the end and seek for my house and garden along the winding lanes of Essex.

I had not forgotten the little man who sold cinerarias at the end of Margaretta Terrace. 'It's not the flowers you're smelling, sir, it's the whole bloomin' countryside.' The time came when I forsook London and the stones of Windsor. Perhaps this was in obedience to echoes of my years in New Zealand, for I was brought up on the sounds of mooing cows and the drone of restless bees. One day I crept into a land-agent's office. I described the house for which I was seeking . . . it was to be old but not with low beams, ingle nooks or any of the features of what we know as *Ye olde Cottage*. I asked for honest, square, spacious Georgian rooms. I asked also that my house should be tucked away somewhere in

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a field, with water near, in a pond or stream. 'I wish to be quiet,' I said.

'Ah, the very thing,' answered the agent.

He took me to a new villa, already speckled by the dust stirred up by the motor 'buses which passed within a few yards of the door. The villa was the colour of cheddar cheese and its roof was of fiery red tiles. The windows were embellished with lead-light tulips and there was no pond, no stream, and not one tree.

'This is the very thing, I think, don't you? A bijou gentleman's residence, you might say,' croaked the agent.

I left him then and I would not travel back with the fool in his car, but sought my own way home. In the months that followed, I saw many houses. Some were farmhouses, falling to pieces, with perhaps one rose blooming in a forsaken garden, to remind me that there had once been talk and laughter and food within the yawning, empty rooms. I saw rectories lined with pitch pine and mansions vast and cheap, with neither light nor water. In the end I found my house, set in the Essex field which I had imagined. It was half-timbered, with good, high rooms. There was a field and it was easy to harness the water of two slim streams into a pond. The oak in my house was taken from Wincelow Hall in which Doctor Harvey was born and, within a mile was the inn which claims to be Dick Turpin's birthplace. I bought my house and I lighted the logs in my Tudor fireplaces. I began to make a garden and I

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found a servant who was a treasure. I found a neighbour with whom I could share jokes and sherry and I picked cowslips in my field. I allowed myself one luxury. I decided that I should be the only author with a country cottage who did not write a book about it. I learned to live an orderly life, with my bath at eight, my breakfast at nine, my sausages for Sunday breakfast, my beef and apple tart for luncheon, and on the stroke of ten, every evening, my nightcap of whisky and fizzing soda. In brief, I too became one of the older people. I learned the comfortable pleasure of habits and, for any writer who is obliged to count his shillings, the ecstasy of an experience which did not resolve itself into words : an experience which did not demand the covers of a book. I wonder if many people think of the struggle and final joy of a writer when he withstands the temptation to turn some adventure, some phase of his growth, into words ? I think that an author's season of luxury comes when he can afford to live certain passages of his life without looking upon them with the journalist's eye : when he can afford to withhold these passages from print and keep them as his own

There is one eccentricity of English country life of which I wish to write, a little facetiously perhaps, because it strikes me this way. Animal worship. The type of Englishman described as ' huntin', fishin' and shootin' ' is not always understood in the new countries. We like the story of the man who, when he was asked by a sturdy rider to hounds,

‘Do you hunt?’ answered, ‘Yes, but only when I have lost something.’

In New Zealand, animals are useful to us and we are kind to them, but we do not always sympathise with the odd twist in the Englishman’s devotions . . . the twist which makes him venerate his horse and his dog and yet turn, quite cheerfully, to see a fox rent to pieces. Even when one has lived in the country for some years, there is something comical about the good Englishman who will sit up all night with his spaniel, because it is low with colic and yet grumble when his tired wife asks him to bring her the aspirin from the bathroom. How often, while staying in a country house, one has watched one’s host greeting his wife in the morning with a sharp peck and then turn, with unblushing fervour, to fondle his dog, calling it by endearing names while the unhappy wife looks on, the golfing stocking she is knitting for her lord hanging limply from her hand?

This animal worship of the English countryside has never ceased to be surprising to me, especially when I recall how, in comparison, wives and children have been forced to struggle to hold their own. There was a society for the prevention of cruelty to animals in England in 1824, but none for the protection of children until 1884. As a boy, I read a passage in *Gulliver’s Travels* which might have warned me of the depths to which an Englishman will sink in his strange perversion.

‘As soon as I entered the House, my Wife took me in her Arms, and kissed me, at which not having

been used to the touch of that odious Animal for so many Years, I fell in a Swoon for almost an Hour. At the time I am writing it is Five Years since my Return to England : During the First Year I could not endure my Wife or Children in my Presence, the very Smell of them was intolerable, much less could I suffer them to eat in the same Room. . . . The first Money I laid out was to buy two young Stone-Horses which I keep in a good Stable, and next to them the Groom is my greatest Favourite ; for I feel my Spirits revived by the Smell he contracts in the Stable. My Horses understand me tolerably well ; I converse with them at least four Hours every Day. They are Strangers to Bridle or Saddle, they live in great Amity with me, and Friendship to each other.'

When I came to live in the English countryside, I found that Swift had not been guilty of exaggeration and that Englishmen do seem to place their horses above their wives, in their affections. How many statues are there in the streets of London to prove this ? Charles the First, in Trafalgar Square, George the Third near by, Edward the Seventh in front of the Athenæum and even that great soldier, Lord Haig, all immortalised in bronze, but with their *horses*. Where is there a statue of a man sculptured beside his wife ? Much as we love him, the Englishman has strange threads in his character which we do not understand. I have been told of an English country gentleman who married a few

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years before the beginning of the war. When his first child was born, his wife tired of him and went away. He was bored by the baby and he *sold* it to a noble Austrian who could not produce an heir. The Englishman's relatives swallowed their bitter pill, but they did not turn the villain away. Not so very long ago, he went out to shoot pheasants from his motor car. He was fined for poaching and, in the face of this offence, his family have refused to have anything more to do with him. Late in 1934, a woman was acquitted at Plymouth Police Court although it was stated that she had held a child's hand near to the fire as punishment for some little misdeed. In August of the same year, an elderly man of Willingdon was sentenced to one month's hard labour for hitting a cat on the head with a pole. In the same month, a husband who had struck his wife with a boot was dismissed with a caution.

Near to me in Essex, there lives a man who is one of the most charming hosts I know. No house reveals the beauty of English country life more than his. Sitting at his table, gently illuminated by candles, watching the topaz light dancing upon Charles the Second goblets and upon the forms of three red lacquer chests, in the dim shadows . . . the silent servants and the procession of faultless dishes, gives one an experience to be treasured. This conventional, cultivated Englishman has been married three times. Through all these fluctuations of the heart, he has retained one elk hound. Wives have come and wives have gone, but the elk hound

has remained. Once when his second wife swooned with a pain, she was swept off to a nursing-home. But when the elk hound wilted with some sickness, my friend stoutly fought any effort to send it to a veterinary surgeon. 'No, by Heaven, no! The vet. must come here. I am not going to let those blasted dog hospital people touch him.' It is to be admitted that the dog has shown more unquestioning devotion than any one of the wives. Each morning, when the elk hound jumps upon his master's bed, pawing his face in a way none of the wives would have *dared*, my friend pats the beast and says, 'Bring me *The Times*.' Although the *Daily Express* and the *Sketch* are delivered at the house, there is no hesitation on the part of the elk hound. He scorns the more popular journals and leaps upstairs, with *The Times* held firm in his jaws.

How often we hear our host boasting about the intelligence of his dog. But how annoyed he is if he has found intelligence in his wife. We see him walking over the fields with his dumb friend, chatting away, laughing, throwing sticks for his amusement, opening gates for him and allowing him to go *first*, and then returning to his dinner table to sit opposite his wife through an entire meal, without addressing one word to her. Never does he pause to realise that she also might be trained to discriminate between *The Times* and the *Daily Express*.

Chapter Thirteen

IN January of 1934, I returned to New Zealand. I travelled over the way by which I had come eleven years before. When the New Zealander has become accustomed to the English scene and versed in English ways, there is a new experience waiting for him. It comes when he goes back over the old ground : when he returns to the little country which hangs like a pendant to the world. Even if he has followed Dubedat's cry for redemption by beauty : even if he has stood beneath the dim Gothic arches of King's Chapel and seen the fountains of Dresden playing on a sunny day : if he has paused in the market square of Hildesheim or seen the Atlantic beating against the vast rock buttresses of the Cornish coast, it is to his heart and not merely in his eye and mind that the great knowledge and changes have come. The irritation and superciliousness which caused him to dislike the colony in which he was born, have passed away. He has come to the state of being able to love men for what they *are*, instead of despising them for what they lack. His hold upon this seed of knowledge is uncertain at first. But he touches it gently, and he feels that he has learned something of which Dubedat never dreamed. Perhaps now he is fit to go home again and to touch the earth which he knew as a child.

Every place through which I passed had changed

for me. Eleven years before I had paused in Paris for one blurred, wet hour, afraid of the wicked city of which I had been told in New Zealand. Now I walked into the Ritz as confident as the slyest old roué, guzzling vermouth at the bar. I came to Genoa. Eleven years before I had been amazed as I wiped the mist from the railway train window, to see the city in the early morning. I had been afraid then. Now I leapt out of the train and sauntered to the newspaper stand where I asked for a Tauchnitz, in Italian which was shaky yet comprehended. Then I passed through the same golden valleys north of Rome. The red and purple leaves of the vines were still suspended from tree to tree and the pink and butter-coloured houses still clung to the sides of the hills. The yellow melons still hung beside their doorways, like children's balloons. In the evening I came to Rome and next day to the Bay of Naples. Naples had been the first great city I had seen on my journey to England. I had walked its streets on the first warm morning, dazed, enchanted. Our ship had come in with its colonial cargo, over the same water in which Nelson had sailed. This had been a miracle to me. I had stood on the steps of the Francesco de Pavlo to see Signor Mussolini ride past at the head of a multitude of soldiers : five thousand plumes, waving from five thousand helmets : bersaglieri, infantry, gendarmes and ponderous wagons, some of them still wearing the scars of battle. I had turned upon the crowded step, to see the Duchessa d'Aosta come out on to the

balcony of the dusty palace, resting her white-gloved hands upon the crimson velvet drapery which hid the balustrade. For the first time, standing there in my raw New Zealand clothes, I had touched the fringe of Europe and I had seen the history of my school books slowly coming to life. This time, I went quietly to my hotel. My excitements were deeper and less tangible. I was going home again, but I still clung to the older hemisphere and found myself wondering what was happening in London : never wondering whether there was rain or sunshine in New Zealand, or allowing the friends of my childhood to people my imagination. I crossed to Alexandria and then to the edge of the Canal, where the aircraft was waiting to take me to Trans Jordan. This was to be my interlude on the way. I broke my journey for sixteen days and flew up over the arid waste of the desert of Sinai, over the bubbling domes of Jeruſalem, down over the cruel hills of Judaea, over the orange trees of Jericho and the shimmering surface of the Dead Sea ; and I landed in Amman. It was all the more impossible then for me to believe that I was returning to New Zealand. Again I sat outside the palace with the Amir Abdullah. It was late afternoon and there was a cool, scented wind coming up from the valley. Many times in the intervening year, I had remembered his smile and felt the lack of it when there was some little joke or nonsense which I could have shared with him. I told him that I was going home. Prince Talal sat with us and translated all we said.

'Then you travel through the Canal,' said the Amir.

'Yes,' I answered.

Amir Abdullah smiled. 'I went through the Canal when I was a very little boy. It was when I travelled from Mekka to Constantinople. Before my father was ruler of Mekka, he was kept in Constantinople by the Sultan. Abdul Hamid wished us to join our father, so we sailed from the Hejaz in a grand paddle steamer which the Sultan had sent for us. We came to the Canal. Our steamer carried the Turkish flag, but the soldiers on the banks of the Canal were British, for your people had landed in Egypt in 1882. When we saw the rowing boats, we thought their oars were wings, for neither of my brothers, Feisal and Ali, nor I, had ever seen the ocean before. In the Captain's cabin I saw many piles of gold . . . Turkish gold.'

"What is that for?" I asked him.'

"It is to pay the British people so that we may go through their canal," he told me. When we came to Constantinople, we were taken to the house of our uncle who was also a prisoner of the Sultan, Abdul Hamid. Our uncle was old and he always pined for our lovely palace in Mekka. My brothers, Feisal and Ali, and myself went into the room where our uncle was sitting beside a stove. He called Feisal to him and he said, "Do you know what that is?"'

'Feisal said "No," for we had no stoves in Mekka.'

"That is a stove to make my room warm."'

'Then I spoke to my uncle and said, "I suppose

you have a stove in this cold land so that the room will be warm and remind you of the sunshine of Mekka." When I said this, my uncle cried so bitterly that his servants supported him and we were led from the room.'

When the Amir ended his story, we walked back to the Palace, for the sun was setting and this was his time for prayer. I left him and as I walked away, I saw him bending upon his prayer rug, his face turned towards Mekka.

I flew to Jerusalem and when my sixteen days were over, I returned to Egypt and the canal, through which I was to pass out of the northern world into the southern world, to which I belong.

Abdul was waiting for me at Kantara. We walked across the dun-coloured sand to the edge of the Canal. Palestine and Trans Jordan had been merry with wild flowers : the stocks and irises, white daisies and anemones which I had known during the months in which I had lived there a year before.

When I left the Holy Land and came to Egypt, I found neither colour nor sweetness beside the Canal. The bareness of the desert seemed to come down to the water's edge and the only pleasant sight was the figure of faithful Abdul, waiting, as he has waited every year, to carry my suit-cases over into Egypt. Last summer there had been an hour to squander before the train arrived, so he had taken me out into the desert, behind the ramshackle railway station. We had soon become lost among the shadows between the sand dunes. One of the shadows had

moved. 'That,' Abdul, had said 'is a spy policeman, waiting for the traffickers who bring the drugs from Istanbul and Bulgaria. They bring it over, hidden under the skins of their camels or in iron bedsteads, and once, in a coffin with a dead man.' The shadow had moved towards us and a face, dark as the desert, had peered into mine. I had been honest enough, it seemed. The face had become a shadow again and passed on.

In 1934, Abdul was full of family troubles—mother dying, brother broken his leg, wicked uncle absconded with all their savings—the sobs in his voice lasted so long that there was no time to do anything but hurry down to the ferry and stand, packed shoulder to shoulder with dragomen, airmen, porters and gully-gully boys. Late at night I came to Ismailia. The room in which I slept was near enough to the Canal for me to see the searchlights of the great ships as they passed through from one half of the world to the other.

The people of Ismailia seem to be only half aware of the canal. They doze in their little shops beneath bunches of chilis and strings of slippers—they move thin, crinkled arms to expel the flies from their baskets of coagulated dates. They gossip, they cheat and they smoke their hubble-bubbles. But they do not seem to heed the procession of ships, thousands upon thousands of tons, passing through a canal so narrow that an Egyptian brat could throw a stone across to the sand dunes which fringe the Sinai desert.

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Sixty years have passed since Lord Palmerston called the Suez Canal a 'foul and stagnant ditch.' Standing here upon a flank of sand, the statement seemed to be even more absurd than when I read it in the comfort of an English chair. But the diplomatic wrangles of Palmerston's day are lost now; they are merely truffles for scholars to nose out from the dust of the British Museum.

Only the picturesque chapters of the story of the Canal matter here, where the tamarisk and hibiscus and bougainvillea help one to forget Whitehall. The history of Suez ceases to be a network of diplomatic argument: it is a succession of colourful scenes, none more pleasing than the final celebration of conquest, when the Empress Eugénie and Ferdinand de Lesseps stood on the deck of the royal yacht, grouped, one imagines, like the figures in a Winterhalter print. A fleet of sixty-seven vessels waited at the stern of their gilded craft to pass into the waterway at Port Said, and with the opening of the Canal, the history of doubts and intrigues was over. Palmerston was dead and de Lesseps was victorious.

There is one little room in Ismailia where these facts become sharp and dramatic. The directors of the Suez Canal have built their comfortable Residency over and above the room in which de Lesseps planned the 'foul and stagnant ditch.' His mean bedstead, his table and his lamp stand where they stood in his day. The wall paper, frayed and drab with age, is untouched. Inanimate objects seem to assume the character of the people

who possess them. Ferdinand de Lesseps' bedroom tells us of a mighty man who trampled the nettles of intrigue under his feet. One says to oneself, standing in the gloom of his little room, that the story of the canal must be retold. But it must be the story of de Lesseps' own life; a story in which the politics and the diplomacy, the engineering and the patience, are all a background for this fierce, brilliant figure, who was brave enough to cut countries asunder and make the waters which washed against the sullen rocks of Aden flow through a narrow waterway and lap, perhaps, against the coast of Palestine.

As one dreams on, pleasantly lost in the avenues of another century, a gentle droning noise comes from the distance. It grows louder and louder and one walks out of Ferdinand de Lesseps' room to look up towards the sky and see eight British aircraft flying down towards Heliopolis. They have come from Amman in Trans Jordan, passing by the way that Jesus walked into Jerusalem, crossing the desert over which Hagar and Ishmael wandered at the heels of Abraham. Eight monstrous, shining locusts, more frightening in their portent than the plague which devastated Egypt. At *their* advent the drowsy shopkeeper of Ismailia stirs from his half sleep. He even rises from his haunches and hurries out into the roadway to watch the silver squadron passing towards Heliopolis. He knows that in time of war, the conquests will be in the air and that the canal will be as vulnerable as his own crazy wooden

shop. If he has any imagination at all, he might ponder over the horror of the air, which sends the great metal birds to kill him if he does not behave himself, and afterwards the lesser, sharp-winged vultures, to remove the last vestige of his miserable body from the face of the earth. Before all these terrors from the sky he might wonder still further, why the missionaries have tried to tell him that the Heavens are a beautiful place, to which he may graduate when he dies.

One morning the big ship steamed slowly past Ismailia. I went out over the sunny water in a launch and climbed up the side of the *Strathaird*. Daylight passed and, when we came to Suez, with the Red Sea spreading out before us, I might have caught the illusion of going home. But there had been letters and newspapers from England, waiting for me on the ship. Again, I thought and talked of London.

I had to sail from Colombo, out on to the stretches of the sea between Ceylon and Australia, before I realised that I was going home. Eleven years had tied me to Europe. When I thought of mountains, they were the sweet smelling pine slopes of Coburg; when I thought of a river, it was of the Thames, carrying the reflection of Oxford's spires upon its breast, down past Windsor and Richmond, towards the sea. Even when we lunched beside the road below Kandhi, I still felt that I was almost in Europe. Our luncheon was English. We lay back, watching the Cingalese boys meandering down towards the

rice-fields, with hibiscus flowers behind their ears. If I lifted my eyes, they were turned towards Europe and the new life I had made. I had said to myself, 'I am going back to New Zealand.' But my own voice did not sound real to me. I tried again and again to force my memory back and recall the New Zealand bush, the deep hanging boughs of the pohutukawa, sweeping the sea spray on the coast, the training camp of 1916, where the wind moaned and moaned, coming down from the mountains which were sulphur-streaked with clumps of broom. It was not until we were almost on the Australian coast that recollection came back to me, fiercely. The Captain was showing me over the ship. We came to the bosun's locker, and as the door opened, a pungent, warm smell came to my nostrils. It was the smell of tar and rope: of windjammers, the smell, after all, of a ship chandler's shop in Auckland. I smelled the dingy shop near to the waterfront, the coils of rope, the folded sail cloth. In any mood as a child, it refreshed me, for it was the smell of ships and of the sea: the smell of escape. From this moment my return home was real to me. When we came to the Australian coast, Europe became dim and I lived the years of my childhood all over again. Foolish pranks popped up out of the limbo and made me laugh once more. I found too, that only the happy recollections remained. The ugly little villas of Fremantle were like the houses I had been used to in New Zealand. There were the same galvanised roofs, making the cottages

look like chicken houses, the precious stag ferns hung from the verandah walls, the picket fences and the privy sentry boxes, set shamelessly at the end of the gardens. Ten days afterwards I was crossing the Tasman Sea in a smelly little ship, tossing and rolling over the last span of water. It seemed then that I would never be able to go back into the world again : as if some gulf, as final as death, had sprung up between me and England. After three days we saw the New Zealand coast. It was the same long white cloud, Aotearoa, which the Maoris saw when they came here from Tahiti. At dawn next morning we turned in between the harbour heads. Drizzling rain fell on the green islands I had known as a little boy, but as we came to the long line of city buildings, the sun slid out graciously from behind the clouds. The same steel cranes leaned over the water from the wharves. The same port doctor . . . it seemed barely possible . . . with his bag and seemingly, the same bowler hat. Nothing had changed except that now I saw only the beauty. In the company of people waiting on the wharf, I saw the one beloved face for which I was seeking. A reporter came up to me. It was true that I had nothing to say. From their kindness, they all imagined that I had come home with my talents increased. They did not seem to believe that I was shy and almost afraid. A photographer came and asked me to stand against the railing for him. Usually I love being photographed and I love being interviewed. I had talked columns of harmless

nonsense in Perth and Melbourne and Sydney. But here I had nothing to say. One night I walked into the crowded Town Hall at the heels of the Governor-General and I sat on the platform with him and, next to us, the Mayor, with his water bottle and his notes for a speech. He rose towards the close of the evening and spoke of me. They applauded then and I had to stand up and thank them. I could not say, 'You are being foolish. Thousands of writers publish thousands of books in England every year.' As I stepped forward from my chair, I saw a microphone near to me. I had not noticed it before. I seemed then to be a figure in a drawing out of proportion. I think that I was ashamed of my own childhood : ashamed of my superciliousness. After I had spoken, an old man came to me. He brought his blind son who carried a book in his hand. It was one of my own. He wished, he said, to have my name in it because it had been read to him and he felt that he knew me well, although he could not see my face. These were the people I had derided as a boy. As I wrote in the book, I think that I despised my own soul. I knew that Dubedat's cry was the cry of selfishness and I was ashamed.

When I had been in Auckland for six days, I escaped into the country. I went to the farm-house in which I used to spend my summer holidays when I was a boy at school. The farm belonged to an old aunt and uncle and with them, when I was no more than an urchin, I had woven my creed of redemption through beauty, for every scene about them and

every moment of their day was peaceful. There had been a wattle grove full of silver-jade light and, on the other side of the cow sheds, where the mason bees stored their hoard of succulent spiders for winter feed, there had been a grove of pines, dark silent, and a little frightening to a child. I do not think that any agitation had ever come into the long married life of my aunt and uncle. I used to see her, when I was little, working in her still-room, making cowslip wine and ginger wine and small sponge-cakes. My uncle would roam the farm in the morning, observing his fat bullocks and the mad ostriches in the neighbouring field. Sometimes I had stirred enough courage to crawl through the hawthorn hedge, near to their treacherous claws, to gather their moulted feathers: enough to make a plume for my hat so that I could run down under the dark arches of the pine trees, and imagine myself to be one of the knights of old, going to save a beautiful princess. It was not always easy to imagine a beautiful princess living in a colonial bungalow with a galvanised iron roof, but I was not poor in imagination when I was a child. In the evening, when the cows were brought home to their shed and when the turkey gobblers in the orchard shook their feathers and settled down to sleep, my uncle would shade his eyes to watch the swans fly across the water to their resting place, which was the flower farm on the opposite bank of the river. The daily life of my aunt and my uncle had always been peaceful: they clung to every vestige of the English

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life which they had left behind them. The New Zealanders were not like the Australians. They had no drowsy, sub-tropical season or terrific stretches of desert to cause them to forget the colder earth of England from which they came.

Almost every happy memory of my childhood was wrapped up in the little farm in New Zealand and in the lives of the two old people who were kind to me there. When I was still young enough to believe in ogres and the little people, I had hunted among the pear trees and down by the river of my uncle's farm for the magic of which my story books told me. It was with them that I first met Father Christmas. I was nine years old before I realised that Santa Claus and my Uncle Joseph were the same person, although I had long thought it strange that Uncle Joseph should always go to his room with a head-ache just before Santa Claus arrived. My uncle was a quiet and religious man, so we were gay only on Christmas Eve and sober, without smiles, on Christmas Day. It was a day of walking on tip-toes, of chapters read to us from the Bible or from a precious book of missionary stories which my great grandfather had brought out with him in the wind-jammer of the 'forties.

In New Zealand, Christmas comes with the fierce heat of summer. The iron pump in the field near by, where the bullocks drank their water, was so hot from the sun that the farm boy used to wrap a piece of canvas around the handle, to save his hands from blistering. When Christmas came, the grass was

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as dry as sticks and the earth was cracked in the bare places. The cattle became ponderous and slow and even the butterflies in the garden seemed to be heavy and tired. The farm labourers walked slowly in the heat, and the tar on the roof of the pigsty was slimy under the rays of the persistent sun. But our Christmas cards were bright with snow scenes, robins and holly. We hung bunches of dried mistletoe over our doors : mistletoe so precious that it was packed into a box when Christmas was over, to serve us with laughter for still another year.

The Christmas tree was put in the dining-room because it was the biggest room in the house. It was so big that we used to play ocean liners in it, with Alan as Africa in one corner and Simon as America in another corner and Edward as England. I was the ocean liner, and my aunt sat in a chair and said : ' What has Africa to send ? ' and Alan had to remember ' Gold and maize, fruit and ostrich feathers,' from the geography book.

When it was late on Christmas Eve : when the black swans had flown away from the river and the barn was so dark that you could scarcely see the rabbit skins, stretched on the wall to dry, Uncle Joseph would say that he had a bad headache.

' The sun, Joe—and all these preparations.'

' Oh yes, the sun,' he would answer, and go to his room.

After a few minutes we would all walk over to the window.

' He'll come out of the barn,' Aunt Ruth told us.

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So we would stare at the door which the Scottish harvester had painted bright blue, to keep evil away from the store within. But we could not see the blue in the dark.

When the door opened, Santa Claus would appear in his cloak and white fur, and come over towards the house. We would follow him to the dining-room. Then he'd hand us our presents, from the tree. He would say : ' You Alan, have been a good boy. You have learned all the trade routes and you know the difference between an optimist and a pessimist. Here is a present for you.'

And then, ' You Edward, have been a good boy. You helped to pump water when Cotter was ill, without being asked, and you have learned how to spell Constantinople backwards.' And then to me, ' You have made the best collection of wild flowers and know the twenty-third Psalm by heart, here is a present for you.'

How Santa Claus learned all these things we never knew.

When I was little more than eight years old, there came the night when I saw that Uncle Joseph's beard was the same as the beard of Santa Claus. I did not say anything at the time. I waited until Santa Claus was gone. Uncle Joseph came out of the room then.

' Is your head better, Joe ? ' asked my aunt.

' Oh much, much,' he answered. Then he looked at me. I think he must have read the truth in my eyes. I rushed to him and cried against him.

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‘ There, there, I understand,’ he said, ‘ but it must always be our secret.’

And it was, because I never told the others.

Twelve years had worked strange changes upon the farm when I went back there. One Sunday I set out . . . no longer in the shallow river steamer upon which I had travelled as a child. I almost flew along the new motor roads, with their garages and their cinema theatres, nearer and nearer to the water’s edge. Once or twice I felt that I should turn back. The warning had come to me when I spoke to my aunt on the telephone. There had been no telephone in the sitting-room twelve years before, the sitting-room in which we used to kneel for prayers at night, our heads bowed in the shadows, below the horizon of lamp-light. It seemed to be an ill omen when I heard the beloved voice say, ‘ Are you there ? ’

The pine trees were still standing and the wattles had grown shabby and ungainly but they still waved gracefully in the faint wind which came up from the beach. My uncle did not look any older. He still wore his white beard and he still carried a wide-brimmed straw hat in his hand. ‘ You’ll find the old place changed,’ he said. ‘ The farming is not the same. Your English friends don’t want our butter and our lamb. I suppose they get it from Poland or South America or somewhere like that.’

We ate our meal on the same long table, but I saw the shining outlines of an electric stove in the

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adjoining room. In my day there had been a big range, fed by coal and fire cones. We used to run in from the field with big mushrooms, to fry them with butter, for our extra, stolen meal. 'We have the electricity now,' my aunt told me. 'And we have the radio and the gramophone. So we are just as smart as you are in London.'

The shabby Turkey carpet in the sitting-room had gone. I used to stand on it when I was about ten years old, to repeat my psalm to my uncle.

*' . . . He maketh me to lie down in green pastures ;
he leadeth me beside the still waters. . . . '*

When luncheon was over, I went into the garden. I recalled almost every tree and shrub. They had not changed : nor the cedars on the slope, the long line of pampas waving their plumes above the meadow, and the yellow and red Chinese lanterns near to the house. The ink berries still grew, purple and wet, in the orchard, and the walnut tree, a fantastic thing to me as a child, when I was told that a wife, a dog and a walnut tree all thrived upon a beating.

We went back to the house from the garden and we sat in the room in which I used to drowse in the warm summer evenings, listening to my uncle reading from the Book of Job. As we sat there, my aunt walked across the room and turned on the radio. A dance tune came across the twelve hundred

miles from Sydney. Its gawky phrases shattered the last stronghold of my memory. Perhaps I was wrong to go back and try to make the old ghosts dance again for my delight.

To return to one's country after the experience of Europe, with one's life re-made, one's work defined, naturally awakens many sensations too deeply personal to be written. But there was one realisation that gave me pleasure and which one may discuss. I always feel that an unfortunate streak of snobbishness pervades the New Zealander when he becomes wholly Anglicised. He does not wish to be thought of as a colonial, fearing the accusations of provincialism and the stamp of the class which Carlyle so aptly described as 'gigmanity.' I was pleased to have both the reasons for being proud and the sensations of pride, in myself, when I came to the little country—the Antipodes—the most distant of all the Dominions in the Empire. It is amazing that fourteen thousand miles should separate the parent and the child; that the child should cling to the English tradition. When Mr. Bernard Shaw was in New Zealand, he scolded the people for referring to England as 'Home.' '*This* is your home,' he said. There may be sentimentality and a hint of obvious patriotism in the New Zealander's fidelity. But there is also something deeper. He hears of the pandemonium of Europe: he hears of dictators and lost thrones and assassinations, but he knows that some blessed quality in the British people teaches them how to live sanely, with dignity and

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respect. It is this quality which holds them, causing them to go on calling England 'Home,' which is a pleasant and a gracious compliment paid to the older people by the child.

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